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*Aira T. Ling*

JUL 1964





THE GOD  
WHOM WE IGNORE



# THE GOD WHOM WE IGNORE

BY  
JOHN KENNEDY  
B.D., Ph.D.

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## FOREWORD

**I** HAVE TRIED to express in this book some feelings and convictions that have been forming in my mind these last dozen years as I have been engaged in the difficult and inspiring task of the Christian ministry. I hear older men say that the work of the ministry is much more difficult to-day than it was in their younger days, and I can well believe it. The pace of life has grown quicker, its secular attractions more varied, its problems more complex, so that great masses of people live hurried, worried, superficial lives with little time or thought for God. Yet the task of the ministry is to bring men to God, and it must be performed in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. I have tried to show what I think of this task and to deal with some of the problems and difficulties that surround it.

Those who are engaged in this divine work will easily recognise these problems and difficulties. They beset them day by day. There are others who are not even aware of them. It is to those latter, who compose the bulk of our nominal church members, that this book is primarily addressed. I trust it may be an awakening book and in some measure lead men to think deeper thoughts of God and His holiness and the obligation to worship and serve Him in sincerity if we would deal adequately with life.

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We hear on all hands of the need of a revival of public worship. This revival is needed not for the sake of the church but for the sake of the individual. I am reminded of an incident that occurred to a friend of mine many years ago in Princes Street in Edinburgh. She saw an old lady behaving strangely in front of a shop window. She was pawing the glass in an excited manner as though she was trying to find her way inside. My friend went up to her and asked her: "Is there anything I can do for you?" She was immediately clutched in a vice-like grip, and the old lady said in a beseeching voice: "Oh, madam, please help me. I am blind, and I have lost my nerve, and I have lost my way!" It appears she had been in the habit of making a certain journey daily through the familiar streets of Edinburgh and usually found no difficulty; but this morning she had been jostled and put off the track and her wits had deserted her. When my friend found her she was in something like a panic.

There are many folk like that. They have lost their nerve in life, and they have lost their way. The only way to self-recovery and to purposive living is to feel the guiding hand of God. I trust what I have written may inspire some to seek that guidance and point to where it can be found.

The experts will find nothing new in this book. Still, it is not written for experts but for the average man and woman. I think they are the important people. At least, as Abraham Lincoln once said,



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God made a lot of them. Yet He did not make them for humdrum living but for the extraordinary possibility of fellowship with Himself. If life is drab and disconcerting and aimless it is not because it is necessarily so. It is because we have missed something, the glory and the purpose of God in Christ. I know how inadequately I have dealt with that glory and purpose, but I have not tried to re-write the Bible. I have only attempted to provide some humble kind of introduction to it. The man who opens the door into a palace performs a useful function. Yet the man who is invited and who enters through the open door into the presence of the king is the man who matters. We are all invited. If I find myself as door-keeper and the reader find himself as guest, I shall be quite happy. The man, much finer than I, who wrote the eighty-fourth psalm was quite content with that position.

I am indebted to Dr. T. Crouther Gordon, of Clackmannan, who read the manuscript and made several valuable suggestions, and who also corrected the proofs; also to the Dean of Manchester for helpful advice. My indebtedness to many other Christian men and women whose books I have read and whose stimulus I have received cannot be acknowledged. All I can say is that I have tried to match my own experience with theirs and say what they have been saying in my own way. I have shared with them and now seek to share with others.

In a book such as this, dealing with the reality of

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the religious life, it is impossible to avoid being oneself; which means it is impossible to avoid error, wrong-headedness and being accused of belonging to some school or other. So be it. A man can only face one way. If, in the intention of his soul, he is facing Jesus Christ he is not entirely misdirected, nor will he completely mislead others. If those of us who love Christ are seeking to walk in the light He gives us, we shall not find ourselves very far apart in essentials.

Perhaps I ought to apologise for drawing so much on my own experience. It is the only experience I have. But because of my personal limitations, I have necessarily approached the problems of corporate worship from the point of view of the Church of Scotland use and order with which I am familiar. This will be particularly obvious where I have spoken of the Holy Communion. I must ask, therefore, the reader of the book to think of me as a Presbyterian writing from his own angle. Others, naturally, will see questions of form and order from a different point of view. But even here I think I can be of most help to my brethren of other churches, should they chance to read this book, by confining myself to my own personal experience. Apart from any other consideration, it seems to me it most helps to a better understanding of one another if we each state our own experiences rather than speak of what we imagine others' may or should be.

JOHN KENNEDY

*Cambuslang*

## THE LOST HABIT OF WORSHIP

WHY ARE so many people indifferent to the public worship of God? As a practical, working minister I have been constantly perplexed by this question. The majority of men and women in our country own a nominal church connection, yet it is comparatively few who feel constrained upon a Sunday to enter the house of God.

The names of these nominal members are on some church's Communion roll, and they show up more or less regularly at Communion.<sup>1</sup> They seek the services of the minister in the major events of life – birth, marriage and death. They are not at all out of

<sup>1</sup> Communion in the Church of Scotland is celebrated, generally speaking, twice a year. "Elders," who are office-bearers charged with the spiritual oversight of the congregation, go round their districts a fortnight beforehand delivering cards to members which admit them to participation in Communion. Any member who, without valid reason, does not attend Communion for three consecutive years has his name removed from the Communion roll. Most church members do try to attend Communion. I understand that this carefully prepared, rarely celebrated Holy Communion is distinctive of my own church and little known in England.

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sympathy with the church's work and witness, for some of them contribute to the church's support. Yet they have fallen out of the fellowship of believers in public worship.

The problem these non-churchgoers present is a peculiar one. They do not explicitly deny the value of the church, yet for them it is not a value *in use*. They seem to see no relevance in worship for the conduct of daily life, and feel no need for any close fellowship with others who profess the Christian faith. A nominal allegiance to the church is all they are prepared to give, and in return they expect its ministrations in the major crises of their lives.

To all who love Christ and seek to make the Kingdom of God a reality on earth, the situation presented by nominal church membership is one of the outstanding challenges they are called upon to face. Yet it is a situation which even ministers themselves do not profess to understand. How baffling it is faithfully to preach the Word and yet to be conscious all the time that it is not reaching those who have most need to hear it. How fatiguing it is to carry through visitation week by week which brings no effective response. How hopeless it is to see the mill-wheel of week-night activities clacking round but grinding no corn. What a waste of energy is expended in our churches with little, if any, spiritual

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result. It is no wonder that many a minister with a religious experience and a real message in which few seem interested is tempted at times to deem himself a failure and wonder if his work is worth while. Members of churches seem willing to share every experience but an experience of Christ.

Yet the crux of the situation is not the effect it has upon a minister but the effect it has upon the world at large. The church is not witnessing to-day. It has numbers, but it lacks power. It is failing to influence the human situation as it might do because so many of its members are only nominal. If it is to win the world for Christ, it must win the people who are on its own fringe, whose names are on its Communion rolls, who use the church for their own purposes, yet who refuse to be used by Christ for His purposes. It must seek to understand them and convert them and bring them into its living fellowship.

Many and varied are the reasons people give for non-churchgoing. "The minister does not visit." "The church lacks friendliness." "The creeds of the church are out of date." "The services are so dull." "I have so much to do on a Sunday." "It is the only day when I can get fresh air." Reasons plentiful as blackberries can be found when wanted for abstaining from something we have no desire to do. Many

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"reasons" for not attending church are of that order. Many have simply no desire to go, and their "reasons" are the mental camouflage they put up to conceal the truth from themselves.

The truth they refuse to face is a startling truth. *They have lost appetite for God.* But "reasons" can be found to dodge this truth, to enable a man to maintain a good conceit of himself, to justify his way of living and, taking himself for granted, to hold that the fault, if fault there be, does not lie at his door.

A man does not like to feel that he is disloyal to his church vows, that he is unfaithful to his religious responsibilities and that he has lost taste for the Christian fellowship. So he rationalises. "If this minister visited me, I would visit him." "If church people made friends with me, I would feel at home in their fellowship." "If the creeds of the church were acceptable to my modern mind, I would be glad to bear my public witness." "If the worship of the church were brighter, I would enjoy it." "If there were a short service at nine in the morning, I would have time for that and my Sunday golf too." It is so easy to say things like these and believe them or half-believe them. It is so difficult to look into one's own heart and say, "I am out of touch with God. I have lost the vision of Christ. I have no pleasure in the Christian fellowship." Yet some men

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will need to realise these things and say them before there is any prospect of their returning to the church.

When we deal with reasons for non-churchgoing and not with the rationalisations by which men seek to delude themselves we find that the question of returning to church is one which many men and women simply will not face. For to face it they must face themselves. They have given up the religious life as a too-difficult personal venture. They have externalised the religious side of their nature and handed it over into the care of the church for its safe keeping while they themselves live life in their own way, being satisfied with a nominal church connection. They will come occasionally to some mass service when their personalities are lost in the crowd. They will receive the minister when he calls and are glad to have him call, for he is the man on whom they have projected the religious side of their nature. They like to stand on good terms with him, but come to church they will not. Every minister has had experience time and again of men and women who will do almost anything for him but come to worship God.

The church connection that such "members" maintain shows that there *is* a religious side to their nature, but the manner of their living proves equally that they have lost desire for God. The real problem,

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therefore, that faces all who have the cure of souls or who desire in any way to extend the Kingdom of Christ is not to get people back to church; it is to get them back to God. No man will be at peace in the church until he is reconciled to God. When we love God with the heart and soul and strength and mind, worship is vital. When we are out of touch with God, real worship is impossible. The minister may be the finest orator in the land, the service may be as bright as an opera, the congregation may be as friendly as a Hallowe'en party, but we cannot worship till we have surrendered to God and in our daily living ascribe to Him all worth and glory.

The return to church is a return to God. It is not a return to an institution. It is a return to a spiritual relationship where God is first and we are second. He is the wise pastor who knows this, who seeks to understand the heart of man and what hinders his whole-hearted allegiance to God revealed in Christ.

Whatever fault may be found with public worship, it is always vital for the surrendered soul. For no dull service can dim the glory of Christ's revelation. It speaks from the Bible; it flows out of the hymns in praise, contrition, thanksgiving and adoration; it cannot be completely excluded even from the



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feeblest prayer or sermon. Let human incompetence be what it may, it cannot dim the glory of God revealed in Christ for those who have eyes to see and minds to understand.

The function of the church is to bring men and women into right relations with God, that, ascribing to Him all worth, they live to do His holy will and enjoy Him now and hereafter. That being so, it is of primary importance that the minister who conducts worship and those who attend worship should be in a right relationship to God. Worship cannot be helpful to the "outsider" if the man in the pulpit is not at peace with God and does not know himself the joy of the surrender and forgiveness he is proclaiming to other people. Neither can worship be a ministry of reconciliation if the congregation is not a "corpus" of surrendered, adoring people. We ministers and church folk must not take ourselves for granted and think that the blame for non-churchgoing rests entirely with those outside the fellowship. What kind of fellowship do we provide? Is our worship so sincere and vital and open towards God that the non-regular churchgoer feels a new depth in life and fresh inspiration as he finds himself in the worshipping community; or does the whole act of worship strike him as wearisome, platitudinous and uninspiring?

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Here is an experience I once had when holidaying in Cornwall. I was staying at a seaside village over five Sundays. The first Sunday I went to the episcopal church; the next four I attended the non-conformist church. In all, I heard five different ministers, for in the non-conformist chapel it was a different preacher each Sunday. The first four Sundays really left me wondering if there was anything in religion. I do not wish to write harshly; that is far from my intention: but that particular church of England service seemed to me to be composed of colourful trivialities, while the non-conformist was mainly made up of colourless platitudes. If this was worship, there was not much in it. I honestly began to wonder if there was anything real in religion and if my own ministrations in the pulpit did seem like that to the man who was sitting in the pew.

The fifth Sunday in the non-conformist chapel an old minister entered the pulpit with a rather severe expression on his face. He did not look helpful; but I schooled myself to be tolerant and patient. Then I got the surprise of my life. "Let us worship God," the old preacher said, and immediately one thought, "Here is *reality*." The preacher was a man of God. It was his vocation to preach Christ and his joy to live Christ. The service throbbed with vitality. I

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am sure I was not the only one who came away glad to have been there.

We ministers must not take ourselves for granted and rant about empty pews when our people might with good reason rant about empty ministers. Souls cannot be fed on platitudes or even on the products of other men's brains. We ourselves must subdue ourselves to God. We must battle against the world, the flesh and the devil until we become God-conscious men not only in our devotional discipline but in the whole of our vocation. We must break through to God or, to speak more wisely, let God break through to us, and we must make it our first endeavour to retain that divine contact. Then, no matter how irresponsible be the people to whom we address ourselves, or how intractable the situations that confront us, we shall always be vital men with a vital message, and that is the end of our responsibility.

Our message may not always be received, but we must never allow ourselves to lose heart at the want of *our* success or *our* response. It is God the people do not want. All that is required of a servant of God is that he be found faithful. To be pushed back on ourselves means defeat and bitterness. To be pushed back on God – and it is one of the privileges of a minister's calling that he is constantly being

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pushed back on God – means comfort, vision, courage and joy.

It is God's work we are doing, not our own. We only need to be faithful. We are not responsible for results. The real problem that confronts each minister is not, "Why do people neglect *me*?" but "Why do they neglect *God*?" Men have been neglecting God all down the centuries. They neglected Christ and the prophets before Him. Let us not wonder that they neglect the prophets after Him. *The servant is not greater than his lord.* If we have found God ourselves, let not even a thought of failure enter our minds. No man is a failure who has found God and whom God is using. Was Christ a failure? It is the finding of God which has given us our mission, or, rather, God's graciousness in using us in His service. We are here as ambassadors for God, and, whether men choose to hear or choose to go away, God seeks them and is using us as the instruments of His salvation.

We ministers are in much need of heartening to-day, for few understand us or look at our work through our eyes. The layman takes it for granted that *we* are all right and is apt to lose faith in us when he finds that we are worried and disheartened. Outside our own profession there are few to whom we can go for sympathy and understanding in the

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great work to which we have set our hand. The minister has to nourish his own soul. He certainly will not find it nourished for him, and the difficulty of ministering to others from his own spiritual resources pulls down the strongest at times and brings him to that valley of desolation when he feels that this calling, which the world calls sacred, is but words, words, words. There are seasons when, in the mystery of His providence, even God withdraws Himself, when one's devotional life is tepid and one's preaching is without unction, and there is simply nothing else to do but battle on. The Presence comes again and the power manifests itself if we have faith and patience, but we have no control over the spirit, and many a man has found himself in the midst of all his ministry wondering . . . wondering . . .

Yet the man who once saw the vision of God in Christ and who still pursues it has neither misinterpreted life nor spent his strength for naught. To fail with Christ is not to fail if it is our allegiance to Him that brings to us our weariness of soul. *He* did not fail. That is the gospel, and we have no other to preach or to live. Christ was victorious, and, however rough the road we tread, as long as it is His road, there is triumph at the end. There is power and joy on it too, as we all well know, so let us press

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on never doubting that the clouds will break and the light of His companionship shine more clearly for ourselves and others. When we keep close to Christ we always discover that sooner or later the light does break, and the full radiance of our ministry floods our hearts in its truth, its beauty and its loving power. Others may not know, but it is our business to make them know. Let us be faithful to Christ and to them.

Let us beware lest, by falling into pessimism at the indifference of the world around us and thinking of our mission in terms of personal failure, we allow our own egotism to intrude on our ambassadorship for Christ. We have no commission to win men for ourselves but for Christ and His kingdom. Let it wring our hearts, if we care, that men do not come to hear the gospel, but let us not even wring our hands that they do not come to hear *us*.

Yet why should they come to hear us if we have only our own egotism to display, dressed up in our intellectual or histrionic gifts or revealed in all its nakedness with no gifts at all? We have a gospel to preach! We must stand or fall by that. We have nothing else to offer the world. If we have no Christ to proclaim, no Kingdom of God to set before men's eyes, we ourselves are a sorry substitute. Let us rejoice when men reject us. It may be the

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beginning of a new discovery—that they want Christ!

Yes, the minister must be Christ's man or he is in the wrong profession. He may make an attempt at it and dither<sup>1</sup> about all his life trying to please everybody, with no clear standards or values incorporated in his person. But he is in hell and he knows it. A minister's first function is not to keep a congregation together on any terms but to bring them to Christ and build them up in Christ. Christ's work can only be done by Christ's men and in Christ's way. Every other substitute has been tried in the church and has failed.

In the same way the congregation must be Christ's congregation if it is to provide a fellowship worth joining and worthy of a man's full loyalty. There are some congregations in which it is difficult to say whose they are. God is worshipped but man is served. Their principal personalities are self-conscious and not God-conscious. God ought to be rather thankful to them for all they do for Him. He is not so much worshipped as acknowledged. They are conscious of their own importance. The minister's chief business is to keep Christ interesting and themselves unruffled. It is true that in every church there are dozens of faithful Christian people, and they

<sup>1</sup> A Scotticism. Means "move around in aimless fuss." A delightful word!

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are the salt of the church as the church itself is the salt of the earth, but the conventional congregation frightens me at times, and I think why it frightens me is because it, itself, is afraid of Christ.

How many of our church members have found God in Christ or are escaping from God in conventionality? It is no good asking the outsider to come amongst them and adopt their conventionalities. He has his own conventionalities. The only invitation that is worth extending to him and that is worth his acceptance is an invitation to fellowship in a Christian community. Sometimes a minister cannot press that invitation because he knows the community only too well. We must begin with church-going people if we are to begin anywhere. We must not take ourselves for granted or take them for granted. Ministers and people have much need to discover Christ and find their fellowship in Him and through Him if they are to discover what the church is and what it has to offer to those outside its influence.

It is possible, I think, for a church to go morbid, that is, to lack normal health and vigour and to turn inwards upon itself and live a diseased kind of life. A church that is preoccupied with its own interior concerns, that is simply struggling to keep its doors open and counts itself "successful" when it balances its accounts at the end of the year, such a church



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has gone morbid. A church that prides itself on the fact that it is of such financial resources as to call a "good man," where its members excuse their presence by the substantiality of their cheques, is past that stage. It is dead.

There are churches of both classes in our midst, breaking ministers' hearts and making no appeal to the outsider. It is not the ministers I am concerned with. Any minister's heart will soon be broken in any church and in any place unless he finds God. The real tragedy of the situation is that there are such churches which are not churches, for a real church, whether its members be poor or whether they be rich, is a society of people who have a great zeal for Christ and who wish to share Him with one another and with the world. It is not a society of people who know each other and maintain a more or less nominal fellowship with each other in a respectable religious cult. It is a society of people who know Christ and maintain a real fellowship with the God revealed in Him in adoration and Christian service. Unless a church exists by that and for that it has no divine reason for its existence and therefore no real reason why it should exist at all.

Yet when we have said all we have said about ministers and churches, the fact remains that even the best of them fail to hold men. Children grow

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up, taught faithfully in the Sunday-school, who prove by their early declension from public worship that they have not been won for God. Young men and women "emancipated" from home and school discipline see no reason for the discipline of the church. They pass its doors on their Sunday adventures with never a thought as to what is going on inside. While thousands of mature men and women pass the Sunday in any secular way that takes their fancy with no conception that prayer and worship are needed to sustain their living. Something has broken down. The church is blamed for it, and in the foregoing pages we have been forward to shoulder any blame that may be going; but we cannot always be blaming the church. It is time to look at the "outsider" himself and see how far the blame lies there.

It may be that the church has broken down in its hold on the individual.

It may be that the individual has broken down in his hold on God.

## WHY MEN DO NOT WORSHIP

HERE ARE those who have broken away from the church altogether. They have definitely gone pagan. Yet the majority of non-churchgoers do not fall into this category. They are still gathered round about the church, on the fringe of its influence, yet baffle the attempts of faithful ministers and office-bearers to bring them self-consciously into its living fellowship.

Why is it that these people, so near and yet so far, have forsaken the worship of God?

One of the reasons is man's haste at all times to be done with discipline. Most non-churchgoers have at one time been members of a Sunday-school. They may not have been members of pious homes, and the Sunday-school is no substitute for that though we act nowadays as though it were, but at least they have been to Sunday-school.

The Sunday-school offers them the ideal of Christ.

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As a child, knowing nothing of life's temptations, the ideal is taken for granted. But, later on, the ideal becomes a challenge, and when it challenges the boy's own autonomy it is consciously or unconsciously repudiated. An ideal involves discipline, and the growing boy is not easily disciplined. If the ideal be vivid enough and the conditions favourable for his allegiance, it will hold him and make him. But if the ideal never be clearly perceived, or if conditions, inward or outward, make allegiance too difficult, the boy will break from the incipient discipline and all that is connected with it.

It is true that the ideal may haunt the boy into manhood and that, some day, in some crisis of his life, he may surrender to it and return to it. But it is just as likely that he will dodge it all his days. He will smother it, bury it, grow cynical about it and even blaspheme against it – this ideal of Christ.

Others confuse religion with religious instruction and regard it as we are apt to regard all forms of instruction, as something to be done with as soon as possible in favour of experiment. They set out to experiment with life and fall into its snares before they have even begun to realise that Jesus came to show us what life is.

The man in the street, because he has had some formal religious instruction in school or in Sunday-school,

## WHY MEN DO NOT WORSHIP

instruction, by the way, which was graded to suit his juvenile understanding, is apt to jump to the conclusion that he has a competent understanding of the Gospel. It is identified with a few Bible lessons, and some texts and hymns that have been learned by rote, and that is all there is to it! In all the confidence of his appalling ignorance, he actually believes that all the church has to offer him is a few platitudes and pretty-pretty stories. He has a sentimental regard for its teaching, as we all have a sentimental regard for the associations of our childhood, but no intellectual respect for it. He has been through the hands of the church, understands it, finds no challenge in it and is content to ignore it. "Now I have become a man I have put away childish things." This is appalling but it is true. There are actually some men living who find no challenge in Jesus Christ. Christianity to them is confused with Christmas cards and Easter eggs and pretty-pretty-ness. It is almost beneath their notice but for the fact that they once were children and still have a touch of romanticism in them; but that Jesus Christ challenges their everyday living they have no notion whatsoever. They buried Him in the Sunday-school. Good-bye to all that!

Father Christmas in the realm of sentiment is still a pleasant memory to me. It is fine to think that I

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once stood tiptoe on the borders of fairyland; but it is not fairyland where Christ is concerned. In the real, everyday world He challenges me, as in the real, everyday world He challenges every man. When we transfer Jesus Christ into the realm of sentiment we are committing blasphemy. Nor are we sinning against our Sunday-school teacher; we are sinning against God, for Christ's life, to say the least of it, was the greatest phenomenon that ever appeared in God's creation. I would sooner transfer an earthquake into the realm of sentiment than I would Christ. There are some phenomena which we must take seriously.

Even those who count themselves educated and who will zealously discuss the problems and the movements of the modern world show a strange aptitude for concentrating on secondary things and missing the primary significance of Christ. Or there are those who find Christ and who, in their pride of intellect, simply find a problem. Christ is not a problem, He is a challenge; but it is so easy to evade His challenge by turning Him into a problem. They will debate Christ or talk about "Christianity," but to live life in His way they do not even begin to try.

Other men, who have some idea of the challenge of Christ, stay away from church because they have

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tried to meet the challenge and have failed. They are persuaded that the Christian life is impossible for them. "The world, the flesh and the devil" have been too much for them, and they cannot take their place in the fellowship of Christ's people. It is easier to stay away from worship than to go and be made uncomfortable. They are not hypocrites. They know their own weaknesses, and they are making no pretensions which they know they cannot fulfil.

There are many folk like this, who look wistfully at the church at times but feel in their hearts it is no place for them. Sometimes they honestly wonder how other folk can go, knowing them as they do. They feel there must be an element of hypocrisy in church-going when they see someone, whose life is no better than their own, even holding office in the house of God. They are tempted to grow cynical about the whole business, yet in their hearts they have a respect for the church and feel that they are not good enough to stand within its fellowship.

Undoubtedly, this conception of the church reveals an abysmal ignorance of its true function. It is not a society which gives a cachet of respectability to its members. It is the body of Christ in the world as He was in the world to redeem and sanctify erring men and women. Yet one can respect men who respect the church even though they show their

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respect by their unwillingness to attend it. The problem is how to reach such men and persuade them that the fight for goodness is not hopeless and that the church can help. The minister has a great chance here, and so have church members if they have love and patience enough for this great human task.

There are thousands of others who would like to go to church, but the sense of fellowship and social solidarity which the church undoubtedly provides has been battered out of them by hardship and unemployment. At one time they went to church, but things have gone against them, and, thinking of the church as they do in terms of social respectability, they feel they cannot maintain their place within the fellowship. Their suit of Sunday clothes has gone shabby, they are unable to make any financial contribution towards the church's upkeep; life has become a dour struggle for existence, and in that struggle they feel that membership of such a socially respectable institution as the church with all the conventions attached to it has had to go.

In vain the minister assures them that the church is there to help them to live, that Christ is adequate at all times, and that it is in the fellowship of Christian people they are best able to maintain their faith in God in their time of crisis. They have identified



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the church with respectability, and on these terms and no other do they feel at home in it.

Time and better conditions bring back some of these "lapsed" members to church, but, very often, when a man breaks with the religious community he breaks for good. It is not merely a matter of money or clothes, but something has happened in the region of morale. The man has had the feeling of being unwanted and frustrated in the community of his fellows. He has gone here and there in search of work. He has had to depend on others. He has had to receive state aid. His belief in his own worth has been badly injured, and he feels that he just wants to get into a corner and stay there.

As far as church-going is concerned, once a man gets into a corner it is difficult to get him out again. Church-going is always a discipline, and it is easy to give in to oneself and forsake the discipline. It is easier still when God has been identified with Santa Claus and when a man feels that he has worshipped Him for naught. He has always been respectable and gone to church, but when hardship came he suffered the same as others. He was able to struggle through without religion, so why go back to church when the struggle is over?

It is no good saying that such a man does not understand religion. He *thinks* he understands it and

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that it has failed him in his need. The gospel which is preached in church is a gospel for comfortable people and not for such as he. We can hardly blame a man for thinking that. In many ways church life to-day suggests as much. Yet it is all wrong; but how are we to get a man to see that it is wrong?

It is only by wise, patient and loving fellowship exercised outside the church walls. There is no time when a minister has to be more conscientious in his pastoral visitation than when his members are passing through a time of hardship. He can hold them by his own friendship with them though they seem to have broken away. Yet the work must not be projected on him alone. The whole church is a fellowship, and if it is a fellowship in Christ it is not a fellowship in respectability but in suffering. To maintain the bonds of affection in times of distress and need is its primary task, and that task must be discharged through the whole of its membership.

There is too much self-reference in our church-going and too little thought that the church exists to minister to human need. It does not merely minister to that need through its official "schemes" but through its spirit of brotherhood which cannot be schematised. But this spirit of brotherhood can be organised, and it should be so organised that the "lapsed" are not forgotten. We need not only more

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ministers with a pastoral conscience but more elders with a friendly disposition who make much of their office. It is within the church's own power to retain or reclaim many of its "lapsed" members, and that power is love.

The very prosperity of others cuts them off from the church. It fosters a spirit of security and self-sufficient egotism which crushes out the need for God. It is a much more fruitful cause of non-church-going than adversity. The prosperous man often feels that he has solved life's problems, when in reality he is so doped with success that he is not even aware of them. He becomes self-sufficient, and in his self-sufficiency he feels that a nodding acquaintance with God is all he needs.

It is true he does not reject God altogether. The prosperous worldling is not a thinker and makes no pretensions to a philosophic atheism. He is so busy enjoying life that he has no time to think about it. God is not rejected. He is not even paid that compliment. He is just ignored. Religion is projected into the church and left there in the form of a church connection. It is easy to place one's luggage in a left-luggage office when one can afford to pay for keeping it there. Why carry it about with one all the time? It is only a burden.

To the self-sufficient man religion is undoubtedly

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a burden. We cannot serve God and mammon. It is so easy to resolve the conflict and live life on our own terms by putting God aside. But if God is God He cannot be put aside. A church connection, for what it is worth, can always be bought, but God cannot be bought. It is high time that the church took its stand and said in the name of its Master that not even a church connection can be bought. Until the church recovers its lost sense of authority and discipline, and is prepared to suffer financial loss for the sake of spiritual gain, it will continue to be humbugged by successful worldlings who patronise it by their cheques and ignore it in their living. The church needs money, but it sometimes gives the impression by its subservience or its silence that it wants only money. There is some money which for the good of its own soul the church should refuse to touch, and that is the money of its non-attending members.

At the same time, as far as showing our loyalty to Christ is concerned, I am well aware that we are not all made from the same mould. There is many a good man whose only direct way of expressing his religious life is his generosity. He cannot stand up in a prayer meeting. It would be agony for him to do so, but he can *give* and he does give loyally and willingly. His willing giving is just as real an expression

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of his love for the Master as the love of another man expressed in service or the ministry of prayer. Let it not be thought for a moment that I am making light of silent church members or that I think they have no religious life because they only seem to support Christ's cause by their money. Money, as Barrie once said, can be a very beautiful thing. No doubt Jesus took that view also. It is not recorded that the poor widow said anything at all! It *is* recorded, however, that she gave her money *going into the temple*.

I know quite well, also, that there are others so constituted that the way for them *into* the religious life is the way of giving. There are many doors into the Kingdom and generosity is one of them. Indeed, it seems to have been for Jesus the main door. It is a swing door, operating both ways. A man may find his interest awakened and start to give, or he may be persuaded to give and find his interest awakened. But the point I am making, and putting forward in all seriousness, is that it is apostasy for a minister, and degrading to the man himself, to play him like a fish for money and fail to make any vital contact with the man himself. When Peter got the stater for the needs of the master, he had to catch the fish too! (Matt. xvii. 27).

Some men will only wake up when they find that

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the church has wakened up, that it has found them out and seen through them and will have nothing to do with them on their own terms, but only on Christ's terms. Then they can accept Christ or reject Him, but they will no longer have the privilege of patronising Him, and the church will possess its soul.

Others stop coming to church because they have struck some bad snag in their personal relationships. A husband may have fallen out of conceit with his wife, a woman may have quarrelled with her daughter or her neighbour, a boy or girl may have had an unfortunate love affair. There are all kinds of things which make people feel inwardly that there is no joy for them in Christian fellowship and which inhibit their free approach to God. Until these "snags" have been removed they find it impossible to worship, and stay away from church.

Very often people project their own personal sense of failure into a quarrel against the church. Time and time again a faithful minister has been "led up a lane" as he listens patiently to the story of some grievance or seeks to unravel doubts and difficulties which are only rationalisations of his member's own sense of sin. Yet time and time again we ministers take these rationalisations at their face value and fail to place our finger on the plague spot and effect a cure.

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We have much need to deal boldly with people, to go into homes with our eyes open and refuse to shut them. We are physicians of the soul and it is our business to bring men to reality, speaking the truth in love. Again I say, we are not likely to get men to church until they are reconciled to God, and this ministry of reconciliation is our chief ministry. We have to be both physicians and surgeons, and sometimes we have to cut deep if we would effect a cure.

I have found that surgery pays, but how skilled one needs to be. Yet it is our business to be skilled. The man who loves his fellow men and who seeks their good will seek patiently and earnestly for wisdom in his pastoral office and count it his chiefest privilege to be a healer of the souls of men.

So far we have been dealing with the individual and trying to elucidate some of the reasons for his neglect of public worship; yet we cannot dissociate the individual from his environment and we must try to understand also the conditions under which men are living to-day and how these have affected their attitude to God.

Modern life is fast, complex and intensely interesting, so much so that it is difficult to see the wood for the trees. The Christian minister, the scholar, or the shepherd on the hills may be able to

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withdraw himself from the daily rush and bustle and think about God; but the average man, caught in the day's business and its pleasures, and cultivating the clear, quick, practical intelligence which seems necessary nowadays "to make one's way in life" (whatever that may mean!), very easily loses, or never cultivates at all, the deep mystical, responsive awareness of the divine which expresses itself in worship.

He develops his capabilities at the expense of his sense of wonder and worships the idols of the marketplace rather than the God who gave him being. Idolatry is the oldest enemy of religion and also the most modern. Immediate gain, immediate success, immediate pleasure and immediate power have all their worshippers. God is not immediate. God can wait.

Life to-day offers us so many prizes, or so many imaginary prizes, that most men are hot in pursuit of them. So the variety and interests and rewards of their immediate environment lead men astray. Their pursuit puts purpose into life, a purpose a man can understand and whose fruits he can enjoy, and we all want to live to some purpose. The ultimate question as to whether his purposes are God's purposes is seldom faced. If no man can serve two masters, he can at least choose his masters, and that



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simplifies things. A man may have a dim awareness that Christ did not choose his way of living but chose some other way, but he has never had time or inclination to understand the way He chose or why He did so. The God whom Christ chose remains a problem, and he has no time to turn aside to investigate the problem, and it is certainly asking too much of him to come and worship a problem. He is quite willing for other people to go and worship God if they want to, his wife and family, for instance. But he is a practical business man and has never been able to find his feet in these matters. He has asked a question or two, but the answers he has received have not seemed very satisfactory, and he has gone ahead with the practical business of living.

Why do men not discover the reality of God? Simply because God is discovered not by believing in certain things but by living in a certain way – Christ's way. When we discover that way of living we shall discover God. The fault lies not in our intellects, but in our own externalised, disorganised and selfish lives. There are people all around us who have found that God is not a problem but spiritual reality, the one satisfying answer to all life's problems.

The practical life of going ahead and doing things

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not only tends to side-track worship but it also seems to many to solve the age-long problem of the good life along purely secular lines. The modern cult of getting things done and of being highly efficient in one's job has elevated itself into an all-embracing philosophy of life. Life is deemed a practical affair with immediate problems to be solved and great social battles to be fought and won. The good life is supposed to be the life that is socially efficient and the benefits of the good life are the benefits of social efficiency. We can achieve happiness for all if we direct our energies towards social ends. Why drag in God?

Convictions such as these have eaten like an acid into the modern mind, so that the church, for many, seems to epitomise all that is reactionary in the modern social outlook. Some are definitely hostile to the very idea of God; others have no objection to God in the abstract as long as He remains an abstraction and does not entangle Himself in man's affairs; both reject worship. Life is a practical affair, and worship is only a dodging of its issues. It is an anachronism and irrelevance and is positively harmful to man's social aspirations. Its inwardness, its other-worldliness, its sense of the majesty of God and the worth of the individual, the peace it gives and the joy it shares, these all seem to side-track

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man's social aspirations and to stultify his efforts at "progress." "Progress" consists of external social well-being. There is no inward side to progress.

The expounders of this gospel of social efficiency do not seem to have any objection to "practical" Christianity. Indeed, they are rather apt to claim that their gospel is *the* Gospel. Christianity is "practical Christianity," and that is all there is to it. They have rediscovered Christ for this generation. He was a social reformer pure and simple, being put to death as an agitator by the powers that be. His gospel was a social gospel.

To do the exponents of the social gospel all credit, they may have discovered some of the implications of the *second* commandment for this generation, but they are wildly wrong when they believe that even the complete fulfilment of the second commandment is any substitute for the *first*. Christ both worshipped and served, and Christianity is following Christ. It is nothing if not worshipful. It centres on God, not on man. To take it for granted, as so many are inclined to do, that the whole of Christ's teaching can be summed up in the parable of the good Samaritan is woefully to misunderstand Him. This illustration of practical Christianity was given as an elucidation of the content of the second commandment, not as a substitute for the first.

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The religion of Christ stands or falls by the worshipful element in it. It is a religion, not a social programme. It is the Kingdom of God we seek and not the Kingdom of Man, and worship is not only the means of our striving but also its goal. The church is thirled<sup>1</sup> to God. By its worship it stands or falls, and by its worship it seeks to influence the world.

Yet worshipful Christianity must not be misunderstood. The God we worship is a moral God who makes moral demands upon His worshippers. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of all good life. We worship not only the divine Being but the divine Will. To this end worship in the Christian tradition is not only priestly but prophetic. It involves the same demands for individual and social righteousness that the prophets and Jesus made. That is the relevance of worship to modern social problems, and without that sense of the divine worth of human life maintained by our worship of a righteous God I do not believe that these problems can be solved.

Worship is not a retreat from the world or "dope" for the world-weary, but strength and vision to face life's problems and to fight for social righteousness

<sup>1</sup> I find that "thirled" is not in the *Oxford Dictionary*. What a pity! It is a Scots word meaning "indissolubly united."

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till God is glorified by man's actions as well as by his praise. It has always been the tradition of the Protestant churches at least that our ministry is a preaching ministry. The content of that preaching is the revelation of God in Christ, and the application of that preaching is to the whole field of human need. What is wrong with society to-day is that men are not listening to preaching on the will of God. They are seeking to solve their social problems without moral authority. It cannot be done. At least, it has never yet been done, and men to-day do not look like doing it. Do they?

The proclamation of the will of God gives the preacher his function in the world to-day. But he must preach and not talk platitudes. If the world is to be saved it must be saved by its prophets, which simply means it must be saved by God. Our neglect of the church is at the heart of all our social problems.

The intellectual confusion of our times, also, keeps many from the church. They want to think things out before committing themselves, and they have never been able to do so. There are so many voices in the world, and even in the church itself, that in the confusion they do not hear clearly the voice of Christ. It never becomes authoritative for them. Perhaps some things written later on in this book

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will help some people, but let me say now that life is not a series of mental syllogisms but a series of experiences; and Christ showed us how to live that we may have experience of God. That is surely what matters and should be authoritative.

Christ does not appeal to our minds only but to the whole of our personality. The truth He offers us is not a mental argument providing the existence of God but an experience of life that makes us aware of the reality of God. That the church should offer men an intellectually satisfying philosophy of life is highly desirable, but that the church should offer men an emotionally satisfying way of life is just as desirable. I make the claim that the church offers both, but it is the genius of Christianity that we cannot have the one without the other. "If any man will do My will, he shall know of the doctrine," said Christ, and the attempt to do His will is prior to its intellectual justification.

There are no "reasons" for Christianity that satisfy the mind and neglect the man. To understand Christianity is to live it. The mental spectator cannot understand Christ, for Christ is life and life is an experience.

I grant that mental snags arise from false or inadequate views of what the Bible is, or from old-time theological statements that express the content

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of Christian truth in thought-forms alien to present modes of thinking, but these mental snags arise mainly through ignorance of the living thought of the church to-day. People who have never entered a church for years will justify their non-attendance by the obscurantism of its teaching, whereas they have only been inhibited by some dogmatism which once flourished in their immediate social circle. In the pulpit, over the wireless, in the books of scholarly churchmen, the level of the church's intellectual life never stood higher than it does to-day. The light that has been shed upon the Bible by the researches of modern scholars has made it a new book to thousands, and out of that same research Christ emerges as a clear, historical figure, probably better known to us to-day than in any other century excepting the one in which He lived. The epistles of Paul have their patient and devout scholars, while archæology is daily revealing the life and customs of the past. The search for truth continually goes on in the church, and it is not fruitless. Men are wilfully impoverishing themselves who are content to remain in ignorance of its discoveries and its thought.

Amid the intellectual confusion of our age the evidence is rapidly accumulating for a real and purposive revelation of God in history culminating in

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the advent of Jesus of Nazareth. It justifies itself to the intellect and approves itself to the conscience. The evidence is not only intellectual evidence. That is the least of it. It is the evidence of Christ Himself, appealing to the whole man as the Way, the Truth and the Life, and being witnessed to in changed lives. It is the evidence of what Christ has done and is still doing in the world to-day. It is the evidence we find in our own souls as we surrender to Him and try to live life in His way. Those who are dissatisfied with this evidence are those who have never tried it.

It is perhaps unnecessary at this stage to dwell at length, as a reason for non-churchgoing, on the faults and weaknesses of the church itself. I have dealt with some of them and shall be referring to them again. The Head of the church is Christ, but its members are ourselves, and God knows we are far from Christlike. Yet, in all our weakness, His perfection still shines through our imperfection and we cannot wholly dim His glory. To bring men to *Him* and to the worship and service of the God whom He revealed is the church's task in the world. We do not ask that the world should look on us but that it should look on Christ. That the world sees us and does not see Christ is our failure. Yet Christ has not failed. It is only we who have failed. Though we



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are bankrupt, the living Christ is always rich, able abundantly to supply men's needs. The message of the church is not, "Come unto us and we will give you rest." The message of the church is the message of Christ, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

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SO FAR we have been dealing with the problem of why some men ignore the public worship of God. Let us now turn to a more important side of the question, why others continue to practise it. That is by far the more interesting phenomenon. It is not at all surprising that men express themselves in purely secular activities which have as their object this-world satisfactions. It is very surprising, when we come to think about it, that others, week by week, should gather in a building to sing hymns, to read out of an ancient book, to utter thanksgivings, petitions and confessions to an unseen Being and to listen to one of their number preaching on the eternal theme of God . . . God . . . God.

Such an activity must mean something to these people, or else they are mad. Yet they do not seem to be mad. Indeed, this activity seems to keep many of them sane. They will tell you themselves that, if it

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had not been for this worship, they might have been driven mad many a time by the pressure of their circumstances, but worship has helped them through. Indeed, there are others who never enter a church door when things are going well with them, yet turn to the church to be healed when they are hurt by life. Worship, then, at least, has some therapeutic value. It is certainly worth our while to try to understand it.

Is it the man in the pulpit who is the healer? Have his words some potent power to minister to minds diseased? In many cases that is so. Many ministers, whether they know it or not, are good psychotherapists. They understand the needs of men and speak healing, reconciling words. They shed light on life's problems, dissipate fears, provide encouragement, renew ideals and reconcile a man to himself and to his circumstances. This is great work, but many a psychologist does the same. There is no doubt at all that, in those countries where the name of God is anathema and His worship discarded as an old-time superstitious practice, such psychotherapeutic work will find its place in the social economy; but it will all be done without reference to God. At least, men will try to do it. Is public worship not an old-fashioned way of carrying through psychical healing, helpful in many respects

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to those who practise it, but cumbersome in its technique in so far as it involves this antiquated notion about a Being called God?

In this connection it may be worth while noticing the words of Professor Jung of Zürich who before his death was acknowledged to be one of the greatest of European psychologists. In *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* he says: "During the past thirty years, people from all the civilised countries of the earth have consulted me. . . . Among my patients in the second half of life – that is to say, over thirty-five – *there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life.* It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given to their followers, and *none of them has really been healed who did not regain his religious outlook.*" If Professor Jung was right – and he was no apologist for religion – the chances of the blind leading the blind aright are somewhat meagre.

We have it on the authority of One greater than Jung that it cannot be done.

There is no doubt at all that the habit of going to church helps men and women to deal with life with a surer touch and with a heightened inward competence; but that sureness of touch and inward competence is not given to them by the preacher. It is

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given to them by Christ. All Christian worship moves past the preacher to a fountain of healing of which he is only the channel. The preacher is the ambassador of Christ, and it is only as speaking in the name of Christ he has any message to proclaim. It is Jesus who speaks the reconciling words, who heals, who encourages, who dissipates fears, who sheds light upon life's problems, who renews ideals and adjusts a man to himself and his circumstances.

Many seek to be adjusted to their circumstances without bringing in the notion of God. They try to accept them in optimism ("things might be worse") or fatalism ("it can't be helped"), but Jesus does not offer us *that* kind of adjustment. He offers us the adjustment of faith ("God is love"). If we are to be healed by Christ we must be healed by Him in His own way and not in our way. To be healed by Jesus is to have faith in God. To come to Jesus to be healed and to leave out God is to go away unhealed. He can do nothing for us if we are devoid of faith! So much is clear. Christian worship means nothing at all if it is not the ascription of worth to God. To centre our lives in God through faith is the first requirement of Jesus. If His teaching has any significance it has that significance, and this centring of our lives in God is the primary activity of Christian worship.

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If Christian worship, then, cannot be separated from the person of its Founder, it is not merely a trafficking between man and man where one man can influence others for their good. It is an activity based on faith, and faith not merely in ourselves but in some one Other than ourselves. It is a trafficking between man and God, taking its direction from the life and example of its Founder.

Many men would admit all this, but their difficulty is to give definiteness and concreteness to this Other. They cannot worship an abstraction, and the term "God" does seem to them just to cover an abstraction. If they were persuaded of the reality of God they would be persuaded of the reality of worship; but the kind of being that Christians *seem* to worship is quite unreal to them. Their worship seems to be directed to a potentate seated on a throne whose one requirement from man is an adulation of his greatness. This kind of worship seems to be quite unreal to them, and, whatever it may be worth to God, it is worth nothing at all to them.

This may seem to many a fearful caricature of Christian worship, but this is the way in which it was put to me by an otherwise intelligent young man, and I do not think he was quite alone in his pitiable ignorance of the God of Jesus Christ. Certainly, if he held that picture to be true, it was a very good

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reason for refusing to go to church. This "God" was simply a magnified Oriental potentate, and his "enlightenment" rebelled against Him as an out-moded superstition.

Is faith in God faith in such an imaginary "Ruler," or is it faith in some One different? Surely it is not the phantasies of ignorant men and women or the caricatures of clever sceptics but the enlightened mind of Jesus Christ that should be the guide to our understanding of the God of Christian worship. If we are going to understand the real meaning of any activity we should seek to know it as it is already understood by its highest exponent. We learn of God from Christ, and if some of His followers have failed to understand Him, that is no reason why we should not endeavour to understand Him better. To reject God because some ignorant men and women have inadequate conceptions of Him is only to be misled by their error. The correction of error lies in the more diligent search for truth, and the better knowledge of the God of the Christian worshipper lies in the fuller understanding of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

To Jesus, faith in God was faith in life. It was something over and above men's ideas about God. It was developed in them by their experience of life and by the way in which they trusted the friendliness

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of the Spirit of the universe to the best that was within them.

Our ideas about God may change. Some of them may have to be discarded. They become inadequate before our growing apprehension of the Spirit of the universe as scientific discoveries inform our minds and spiritual discoveries enlighten our souls. It is this experience of life that increases our awareness of God till we come to know Him, not as a mental abstraction, but as the living, creative Spirit who is above all, through all, and in us all, responding to all our striving after goodness, truth and beauty.

When our eyes open to beauty and we find it already there to be admired; when our souls respond to goodness and we enter into peace; when we seek for truth and find that the universe is rational – we become aware of God. Life responds to faith, which just means that God has been there before us and is with us. Our ideas about God may be sub-Christian, but a developing experience of life will not allow us to remain with sub-Christian ideas of God. It is the living God with whom we enter into relations in our experience of life as we trust more and more in its sustaining spirit of goodness, rationality and beauty. If men are content with sub-Christian ideas of God it is because they are content with a sub-Christian experience of life. If they worship a



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“worthless” God it is because they have not sought “worth” in their daily living which has increased their sense of life’s spiritual values.

It is freely admitted that it is not easy to see with the outward eye that the Spirit of the universe is holy and rational and beautiful. Life is not such an open book that he who runs may read. In our haste to make money, or to achieve success or recognition, in all activity that centres on self and closes the heart to the needs of others, we miss this fellowship with the creative, sustaining, universal Spirit. We may pay tribute mentally to the idea of God yet miss experimentally the reality of God. God is not an idea in the mind, a mental abstraction isolated from our experience of life. He is the sustaining Spirit of creation and our souls, so that if we do not find Him in our own experience we do not find Him at all. He can only be found fully by those who live in a certain way – Jesus’ way.

It is true that many have believed that they have found God and have worshipped Him and then have discovered that through some change in their circumstances their worship has become unreal. Some ugly snag arises, things go awry, and their faith breaks down. That often happens. The confident spirit of worship fades away to be replaced by loneliness and doubt.

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But what are the circumstances in which we must find God? Surely they are not our own particular circumstances but the whole circumstances of life shared by all mankind. Our faith breaks down because it has been too self-centred. It has not been compassionate enough. It has been based on self-regard and not other-regard as was the faith of Jesus. It is true that at times we are forced to ask the question, "Why has this happened to me?" But the answer to that question is involved in the larger question, "Why has this happened to them?" If we have entered with sensitive compassion into the sorrows of others; if we have allied ourselves with them and sought to help them; if we have allowed our faith to enter into all the circumstances of life and have seen purpose in them even though we have seen it dimly; if our souls have responded to beauty; if our lives have been other-regarding and not self-regarding; in short, if we have lived as Christian men and women – we shall find that our faith in God, even in our utmost need, is illuminating, directing and sustaining as was the faith of Jesus.

Here is an extract from a little book<sup>1</sup> written by Philip Inman, chairman of Charing Cross Hospital, London. If any man is brought face to face with the fact of human suffering it is he. A great scientist

<sup>1</sup> *Christ in the Modern Hospital.*

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once said to him, "I don't know how you stand it. I should either break down or go raving mad." Here is his answer.

"If I have kept my sanity through all these years, there is one supreme reason. I believe in God. I believe that under every experience of life and of death there are the everlasting arms. I have seen men and women driven to their knees by the overwhelming conviction that they have nowhere else to go.

"And they have risen changed in every cell of their being. In the shadow of death, fear has been banished and a courage has been found which is sublime. And I have seen their loved ones helped up by a faith that is living, vital, triumphant. There is no earthly explanation of these things. They tell of a power that is greater than human. And that power is God."

Here is a very different God from the Eastern satrap seated on a throne. Here is the God of experience, the God of Jesus Christ, the God of Christian worship. Faith in this God is faith in the good and friendly Spirit of the universe, whose purposes are past our finding out when we are here upon the earth, but who responds to every genuine human cry for comfort or for guidance.

I was once called in to minister to a dying woman

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who was living in a "single-end" with an unemployed husband and two small children. I prayed with her and after the prayer looked at her lying on her bed. There was a holy light shining from her face and an expression of ineffable peace. It was not some self-absorbed potentate that visited that poor woman and bathed her in his calm, but the blessed Spirit of our souls whose love goes out to all His creatures. That is the God we Christians worship, "faintly hearing and dimly seeing," as Whittier says, yet never entirely unaware of Him as we seek sincerely to apprehend Him by living in the way of Jesus.

This faith in God is not faith in His friendliness to our own self-absorbed purposes, to be jettisoned when they are thwarted, as though God were merely a hired, daily drudge to attend to our selfish wants and be discarded when He is no longer giving satisfaction. Faith in God is faith in His universal purpose of love to the lonely, the suffering, the sinful and the indifferent. It is faith in His faithfulness as taught us by Christ.

I remember once going for a walk with my wife after a dear friend had died. We were oppressed by "the burthen of the mystery of all this weary and unintelligible world." In silence we took a short cut home, and our path led us through a nursery. It was June and there were thousands of roses out in

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bloom. The Creator Spirit was at work bringing out of dry branches a myriad forms of beautiful life. It was in this same universe, only a few hundred yards away, that life had been taken away, yet here at our very door was life abundant. If God were working in that garden, was He absent from that home? If God were the creator here, was He the destroyer only a few hundred yards away? We did not understand all the workings of His wisdom, but we had faith in His faithfulness, and our hearts revived.

It is Christ who deepens and confirms that confidence. "I am come that ye might have life and that ye might have it more abundantly," and life is faith in God. We cannot go a step forward without that. Worship helps us abundantly to keep living in faith.

How strange the world is! While we are sorrowing another is glad; while old folk are lonely, young folk are awakening to the dawn of love; while some are suffering, others are rejoicing in their strength. What are we to make of it all? That gleaming, fragrant roses are meaningless, that the universe is meaningless, and that life is meaningless? Or that the highest values we are aware of are the real values and that the Spirit of the universe is friendly to the good and the beautiful and the true? The one is

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pessimism and the other is faith. It is the Christian experience that life responds to faith.

Worship is based on faith, faith that is far-reaching and deep, which involves the sufficiency of God for all men as well as for ourselves. It is faith with a great compassion in it, as well as a great hope, that goodness, truth and beauty are of the nature of things and will triumph. Such was the faith of Jesus, whose faith was not merely for His own circumstances, but for all men's circumstances, yes, even for yours and mine.

I shall be convinced that worship is a discarded superstition when I am convinced that Jesus was wrong. The more I live and the more I experience of His way of living, the more I am convinced that He was right. And this conviction, born out of my own experience, is immeasurably strengthened when I find it shared by others. Are men mad who share the faith of Jesus and who gather to express it in public worship? Or are men mad who look on Jesus Christ, then deny the reality of God?

But the trouble with some seems to be that we conceive of God as personal, and worship and pray to Him as a hearing, understanding Being. They have no experience of this personal Being at all. Our God, they say, is anthropomorphic, the creation of man's mind. Why worship a mental abstraction?

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If we worship God as personal, it is not because He is a mental abstraction which we have endowed with the attributes of manhood but because He is a Being who meets us in moral, intellectual and æsthetic relationships. If we think of Him as personal, it is not because we know all that divine personality involves but because we have discovered that life is rational, and moral living brings us further "ben"<sup>1</sup> into the secret of life, and the beauty in the world around us enriches and inspires our souls. Now it is only a "person" who can be rational, and it is only a "person" who can be good, and it is only a "person" who can create beauty, so that we believe that behind the phenomena and experience of life is a living universal Spirit with whom we have to do.

It is with this Person (we can speak no other way) that we enter into communion when we come to public worship. But we do not come to find Him in church. We come to worship Him; and we come to worship Him because we have already found Him. If we do not find God in our own experience of life, we shall not find Him anywhere. No, not even in the church! What is *life* for but that we may have experience of God?

Christian worship is the adoration of the living

<sup>1</sup> Another good Scots word. It means "inside." The old folk talk of "ben the hoose," meaning "inside the house," referring to the warm living-room.

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God, who has so made us that in our experience of living we can have fellowship with Him. It is a centring of our lives in God, personally and socially, as we acknowledge Him, ascribe to Him all "worth," and seek to find our own "worth" in the doing of His holy will as revealed in Christ. It is our witness to the reality of our experience of the life of love and faith, to the spiritual values they have created in us and which we have seen created also in the lives of others. It is the outward expression of an inward experience that God *is* and that God is good and rational and holy.

Above all, it is an activity in which we seek to achieve communion with God in all our human need. It is our acknowledgment that God, being "personal," is able to enter into loving relations with us and hearten us onward. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

The power and joy of Christian worship is the conviction that God is for us in Christ. It is that conviction which inspires all Christian worship, without which for most men it would be but seeking and not the joy of finding and possession.



THE HEART OF PUBLIC  
WORSHIP

**B**UT WHY *public* worship? Can a man not worship God in private? Or can a man not live a good life without the necessity of going to church? Is there anything done for a man in public worship which he cannot do for himself?

Many of us ministers flatter ourselves that people come to hear us. If we are "good" they will come back again; if we are not good they will stay away. I believe there is a lot in that. Certainly it is not a matter of indifference to a congregation what minister is in the pulpit. One man goes to a church and "fills" it; another man goes to a church and "empties" it. It does seem to be too much to ask of the majority of Protestant people to come to worship God irrespective of the man who is conducting the worship. Our worship is mediated worship, in practice if not in theory. The minister does matter, despite our Protestant principles.

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This simply points to the fact that the majority of people are very *dependent* in their religious life, and they come to church just because of that. One man may certainly help them more than others, but it is not only the minister who helps them. It is the company of their fellows. It is the service itself. Without some such gathering together most people could not maintain their faith in God, and they do feel that the maintenance of that faith helps them to live. That, I think, whether the minister is "good" or not, is why so many people go each week to church.

The habit of church-going helps men and women in many ways to deal with the daily business of living with a surer touch and with a heightened inward competence. They feel for the time being taken out of themselves into wider realms of thought, emotion and experience than that which is their environment six days of the week. It is not merely that the church is a social club and that church-going satisfies the gregarious instinct which is in us all, though it is entirely good for us all that this desire to enter into relationship with our fellows should be satisfied. The satisfaction achieved is not merely a social satisfaction. It is satisfaction in God.

Public worship has been defined as "a movement of the soul into an apprehension of the Being and

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Will of God. It is a movement from the temporal to the eternal, from the particulars of life to the whole in which they have their being, from our confused and scattered and selfish wills into a surrender to a self-consistent, stable and loving Will. It is a movement of the soul which gives our lives the stability and strength of moral purpose, and in that moral purpose we find our peace and joy."

In this kind of activity we enter into an awareness of the Author of our being. We sense the actuality of God. However feeble our religious convictions may be, they are stimulated for an hour or so as praise is offered to the Creator, and prayer is made to the Father of our being, and the requirements of the God of Christ are set forth in the reading of the scripture and reinforced in the preaching of a sermon. This may not be all there is to worship, but it is something, and something that helps the average man to live. His mind, perplexed by the range and variety of life's interests, is rested for a little while as he turns from the details of his existence to the Author of his existence, from the parts to the Whole, from his own restlessness and need to God's eternal beauty and power and love and peace.

People come to church because without it they do not know how to handle life and to get on top of its worries and problems and temptations. They have

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a sense of fighting a battle which might go against them were it not for the light which Christ sheds upon their problems and the encouragement He affords. He not only helps them to live but to live better. It is true that the Christ life seems to be so high above us as to be unattainable, yet at the same time it is there like a lodestar beckoning us on and certainly shining for us as a light in darkness. If Christ does nothing more for us, He gives us a sense of direction. We are directed by our inspirations, and He inspires.

Life presents problems that demand answers. Who are we? Why are we here? Whither do we go? How should we live? Our ordinary activities do not supply answers to these questions. They often blind us to the fact that they are there. Our newspapers, our politics, our novels, our social engagements, our home life and our business life all supply us with so many avenues of activity and satisfaction, yet they leave the big questions untouched and often drug us into insensibility to them.

Yet never entirely; sooner or later life presses in upon us with its mystery and profundity; sometimes mocks us with a sense of futility; and we lose our zest for immediate things and crave to be lifted out of them into some higher realm of satisfaction.

It is that kind of feeling that drives people to

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church and makes them continue to go. Life would be stale, flat, profitless and entirely disconcerting were it not for the awareness of God which the church service brings and for the light which is shed on life by the life and teaching of Christ of Nazareth. He gives one an attitude to life, and the worship of the church maintains one in that attitude. Without that, one might be smothered in a clutter-up of superficial demands and pleasures, and life be nothing but a muddle through aimless and unlit days.

When, in George Eliot's book, *Romola* was fleeing from Florence, where her life with her husband had become unbearable, she met Savonarola, the preacher. He pressed her to go back and walk the flinty path of duty.

"But if you knew what it was to me," she said. "How impossible it seemed to me to bear it."

"My daughter," he said, pointing to the cord around her neck, "you carry something within your mantle; draw it forth and look on it."

She drew forth the crucifix.

"There," he said, "is the image of a Supreme Offering, made by Supreme Love because the need of man was great."

Inspired by the cross she went back home.

Something of the same nature happens when we

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go to church. We catch some glimpse of One who was supremely courageous and we ourselves are heartened onward.

These reasons for church-going may not imply any deep religious experience, but for the comfort of the average man, of whom I am one, I think we should remind ourselves that deep religious experience is not easily come by. They do at least imply that the church-goer has an attitude to life in which he wishes to be maintained and that the worship of the church does refresh and strengthen him for the daily business of living. It does do something for him which he would find extremely difficult if not impossible to do for himself.

If the church had no other object in the world than just to relieve the pressure of living and to give to men and women each week a sense of wholesomeness and refreshment, it would fully justify its place in modern society. In this sense the penalties of non-churchgoing are obvious all around us. Men and women are breaking down through worry, moral defeat, loneliness, and lack of power and joy. The church is a great centre of healing if they would only use it as such. To heighten our awareness of God, to attempt the Christ life, to recover our sense of solidarity with our fellows – these are immense helps in facing up to life. Indeed, I am convinced

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that without them we cannot face life at all – not adequately, with power and joy.

There is a familiar story told by Baron von Hügel of a young American sceptic who came to Dr. James Martineau and confessed to him that he had become uncertain of his life-long denial of religion. Perhaps there was something in it after all. Could he assist him in any way?

The doctor told him to make an experiment. He was to go and live in the company of believing people for six months, then transfer himself to a community of unbelievers and judge for himself which had that mysterious thing, a hold on the secret of life.

The American went to Germany for a year and returned to report. He had spent his first six months among the Westphalian peasants. They were crude, slow-minded and even superstitious, but they did know how to handle the deep realities of life, birth and death, love, suffering and sin. Thereafter he had gone to live among the Berlin students. They were clever, witty and delightful companions, but before the inescapable realities of life they had no clue – no inwardness.

It is that inwardness and confidence which the humblest people can have which make all the difference. There is no substitute for the lack of them.

Yet if church-going is to bear fruit to us and to

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redeem and sanctify our living, it must not be merely because it satisfies our sense of the community, or heightens our awareness of God, or gives direction to our living by holding up for our contemplation the personality of Jesus of Nazareth. The church may do these things for us and keep on doing them and yet we may never know blessedness or peace. It must do more for us. It must save us from our transitoriness, our sinfulness, our sense of alienation from God. It must cleanse us and give us life.

To this end let it be remembered always that Christian worship is not the approach to any kind of God, but to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We worship God *through* Christ, through all that Christ revealed of Him and in response to His own activity in seeking and finding us in Christ. Worship, therefore, involves a trafficking with One whose attributes are already known. The clearest thing about our worship is the nature of the God with whom we are dealing. His love has all the clarity of Christ's cross. If He is revealed in Christ at all, He is revealed there.

Worship, therefore, makes a great demand of us, the demand that we sincerely seek God and in faith accept from Him His forgiveness and peace. The prayers of confession and contrition which express our seeking after His holiness are not formal adulation,



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nor is the benediction which bestows on us His blessing a mere conventional ending to a service. They involve an approach to God and the reception of a gift from God – our offering of ourselves in worship and His closing gift of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Many a man goes to church and is cut off from his fellows in a dozen ways – by his selfishness, his discontent, his greed, his anger, his pride, his sense of self-sufficiency. He is there, and there is a subtle sense of satisfaction in being there, one of the crowd, but there is no joy in it. He may even be dimly aware of God and be momentarily satisfied by the total view of the universe which the awareness of God brings, but it is only something which has passed across his intellect and is gone. The vision of Jesus' life of love and mercy may shine for a little while and point the way but he lets the vision pass. It is a good habit and he feels that it is good to be there. Sometimes he is arrested and stimulated and helped more than other times but his worship is only an activity among other activities. The world soon reasserts itself and the difference that worship makes is not *vital*.

I wonder if I am overstating the case if I say that worship to many people seems just like that. It helps them, sometimes more than others, but it does not

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renew and bless them. If that is all that worship *can* do it is difficult to understand why the church has persisted down the ages. One would have imagined that it would just have faded out long ago as having too little vitality in it to stand up against men's other activities and interests. There *must* be something more in worship than an occasional emotional glow or a passing awareness of the reality of God.

This something more emerges in worship when it is the adoration of God by forgiven men and women who have entered into fellowship with Him through Christ their Lord and who seek to be maintained in that fellowship. Worship is adoration. It is the giving of ourselves to God. It is the surrender of our self-sufficiency to God's sufficiency. It is our heightened awareness of the boundless love of God as we contemplate the cross of Jesus Christ, a love in which – wonder of wonders – we are included. It is our reception of His reconciliation so that our purposes are no longer our own self-centred purposes but His purposes. It is the losing of ourselves to find ourselves – in God – the creatures of His creating, His loved and forgiven children, the sons and daughters of His everlasting kingdom. Worship is the finding of the “worth” of all our living in God, and that God the Father of Jesus Christ. How can those

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who find that worth refrain from giving thanks to Him, from praising His glory and His goodness, and from sharing His fellowship with others? Our worship must be public worship. The God of Jesus Christ is no man's private possession.

It is surrender to God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which makes worship real. Without that surrender, we are only seekers. We have not found. To seek God is good. To find Him is joy. To worship Him is blessedness and life.

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SO FAR we have been dealing with the man-ward side of worship. Is there a God-ward side? We have been saying a great deal about God. What authority have we for saying so much about Him?

It often does seem that the whole of our religious life is an effort to find God, and because of the difficulty of the quest many a man gives up the search. But there is another side to our search for God. There is God's effort to find us. That is the story of the most familiar, the most strange, the most popular and the most neglected book the world has ever known.

The Bible we have is a translation of a collection of Eastern documents dealing to a large extent with laws, customs, historical events and modes of thought of little direct import to our modern Western interests and ways of living. The study of the

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background of the Bible is the study of a lifetime to be undertaken only by specialists, and there are many problems as to when its component parts were written and what certain of its writings mean which are still obscure. But it stands or falls as a unique and revered book not because it is a valuable repository of the customs and beliefs of the past, but because it contains the record of a movement of God in history which demonstrates to us clearly that we are not only seeking Him but He is seeking us.

We find such a movement in the preaching of the Old Testament prophets, in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, in the call and apostleship of Paul, and in the activities of the early Christian church. At this time men closed the canon of the book, but this does not mean that God ceased to be active in the first century A.D., but that the classical period of the origins of the Christian faith was over. We believe that this movement is still alive to-day, that God is active in our midst earnestly seeking to redeem and bless men. If we did not believe that, our worship would fall to pieces.

Let us look at the justification of this great belief in the activity of God. We start with the Old Testament prophets. There were two sides to their activity. On the one hand they were men of religious sensitivity and intuition, hearers of the

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voice of God. On the other hand they were politicians, concerned with the welfare of the state. They felt the constraint of God upon them. Nothing is more common in their utterances than the conviction that they were moved to preach and declare the requirements of the Most High.

But what proof had they to offer that God was what they declared Him to be? Had they only their subjective experience for that?

Their experience was not only subjective but objective. They found in the actual events which were happening around them proof of the nature of God. We often think of them as predictors of events. But they were not so much predictors of events as interpreters of cause and effect founded on their knowledge of God. They were seers. They saw into the nature of things.

They could predict because they could interpret, and they could interpret because they understood God, and it was God Himself who had brought them to that understanding. Nothing is commoner in their writings than the ascription of their insight and their constraint to preach to One who was other than themselves. "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me." "Thus saith the Lord." Such are the invariable preliminaries to their utterances. It is true that their messages were mediated through

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their own personalities and things temporal and things absolute were mingled in their minds, but *history* bore out the content of their utterances that God was righteous and the stability of human society was only to be found in moral conduct which incorporated absolute moral laws in the events of time.

It is necessary to understand something of the limitations of the prophets. They were subject to the thought-forms of their time. The action of God on the affairs of men was a retributive, this-worldly action. They had no belief in any moral issue in a world beyond the grave. God punished or vindicated in this world. Nor did they regard morality as simply working itself out. They looked upon God's judgments as catastrophic rather than evolutionary; though it does seem to me that they were more right than wrong about this. A nation on the wrong road does not take long to come to judgment. The point is they believed in a moral God and, taking a longer view of history than their contemporaries, saw His judgments working in the world.

Is it possible to hold to-day to this prophetic doctrine of the activity of God? That is a crucial question for the modern world and it is being answered in many quarters in the negative. History to-day is very largely regarded as a purely secular

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sequence of cause and effect with God, if there be a God, as an impassive power in the background. Are we right in denying the convictions of the Old Testament prophets or are we to follow them in finding meaning in events which manifests the activity of a living, moral God seeking to impress His mind and will on the affairs of men?

There is a certain account of the universe we have from science which affords no clue to any moral purpose in it. A description of the phenomena that we know, based on astronomy, biology, geology and anthropology, reveals a great impersonal system. Did not some fool of an astronomer once declare he had scanned the universe with a telescope and had not found God?

But let us be careful before we accept the scientific description as a complete description of the universe of which we form a part. It is not a closed account of the total system of real things unless the things that can be measured and weighed are the only real things, and the ideals and purposes and moral activities of man are quite unreal. Love is as real as stone and lime and has more to do with man's happiness; and hatred is as real a factor in the universe as coral reefs or distant stars. The universe cannot be interpreted without taking into account the activities of man. A thought is more significant



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than a star. A thought creates; a star disintegrates.

The account of the universe presented to us by scientists is an account based on abstractions. They abstract certain aspects of reality and endeavour to build up a theory as to the nature of the universe as a whole, but any theory based on abstractions cannot but be false. We do not object to scientists being scientists, but we object to the superstition that they reveal reality. They may show us *how* the universe is made and that is very interesting. They cannot tell us *why* it is made, which would be a deeper revelation of who made it, and that is what we need to know.

The scientist can help us to understand the stage on which we are acting our parts. He cannot tell us what the play is all about. As actors, we not only wish to understand our environment but the drama which we are playing. It does look from its setting as though it were a drama and not a comedy.

We must turn to man and his activities if we would understand the universe and the God who made it and the part we play on it. The astronomer is as much a fact of the universe as the star he astronomises upon, the geologist as the rock he studies. The astronomer's loves and hates and ambitions and ideals have more potential meaning for the understanding of life's mystery than the star. If the star

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could study the astronomer, it would be set a great problem as to what kind of universe produced *him*. It would find in him a force operating from its own centre, doing things which it could not do, changing the surface of its sister globe, coalescing with others, loving them, hating them, directing its activities to some self-appointed end, and it would say to the astronomer, "If you wish to understand reality, don't trouble so much about understanding me. Understand yourself. Find out what *you* mean, if you can. What you are is the best indication you can get of the God who made both you and me."

We must turn, therefore, to man and his activities if we would find God. Do the activities of men give us any indication that there is a Being active in the world impressing His will on men and using them for a purpose, or is history just a meaningless jumble of events without any pattern at all? I do believe we find a pattern in history and that this pattern is a revelation of the mind of God to which we must conform or perish. A moral meaning does seem to shine through, only we do not seem to see it clearly. It may be that the pattern is bigger than our minds can grasp.

Taking a long view of the consequences of men's activities, we do seem to see a moral meaning in

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history. In the rise and fall of nations we see actions followed by consequences. We find that we are not living in a world of chaotic inconsequence but in a world of moral judgment.

Are our ideals and purposes and activities not sustained or broken according as they conform or do not conform to the requirements of love and righteousness and mercy and goodwill? I think history does illustrate that doctrine both in the lives of men and nations. For all the power-politics to-day and their seeming success the verdict of history is against them. When we think of the history of our own nation, and of the rise and fall of other nations, we find a moral meaning which points to the nature of reality as a whole. It vindicates a certain way of living and destroys another. "Right and wrong," as John Morley said, "are in the nature of things." Morality is not just a feeling of rightness inside us. It is an integral part of reality which we ignore at our peril. God is not other-worldly. He is this-worldly. He may not, to quote Morley again, "pay us our wages every Saturday night," but He is not indifferent to the kind of work we do. If the recompense for that work is not always a here-and-now recompense, it does not mean that life has no moral meaning.

Such was the experience of men of old and such

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was the conviction of the Hebrew prophets. The world has not changed since their day.

The meaning that history reveals is meaning for our personal lives. We are all part of the scheme of things and we deny "reality" at our peril.

The doctrine of the moral nature of God was, of course, seriously challenged by the war. It smashed any doctrine of quick returns in the matter of retribution and reward and seemed a complete refutation of the Christian interpretation of life. Because the war made such a crucial difference to most of us who are of mature age, we are apt to judge it as a phenomenon in itself—an isolated fact in history. It was something that came into our lives out of the blue, a huge impersonal cataclysm which broke into our personal fortunes. As such an event it seemed to disprove the fact of an over-ruling and moral God.

"I'm done with God! I'm done with God!" cried a woman of his congregation who once broke into Professor Gossip's study with a telegram in her hand. "I have prayed to Him every night that my boy be spared, and now he is killed!"

That other mothers' sons were being killed had not shaken her faith in God, but that He had not intervened to save her sorrow was proof of His indifference or selfish self-absorption. Yet surely, and we may say it sympathetically, that the war had

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hitherto not tested her faith was proof of her *own* self-absorption.

If there is a God, and especially if God is the kind of God the church says He is, why does He not stop the war? So men and women asked in their extremity. Men with no historical background to their thinking and women ignorant of almost everything except their own affairs could not help asking that question. God can do anything, they said. Therefore, God can stop this war if He wants to. He does not stop it. Therefore, God is either indifferent or there is no God at all.

Such a line of argument, however natural it was at the time, isolated the war from history, that is, from the previous activities of men. The war was the effect of moral causes. Reliance on power to achieve one's ends, greed for gain, suspicion, hatred, social injustice and national rivalry were the prime causes of the war. Yet few men who took part in it and fewer women who suffered from it knew anything of the history that went before it and probably fewer still related it to that history.

But the war, sunk in history, as the outcome of forces that denied the moral supremacy of God, is the greatest demonstration of that supremacy that the world has seen. Well might a Jeremiah have said before the war, "If you do thus-and-thus, *this* will

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happen." Yet we would probably, as his contemporaries did, just have brushed him aside as a Jeremiah and gone on to the crash.

The war has had this consequence, however. The war survivors are now in middle life and there is hardly a man in a responsible position now but who was affected by it. We may leave aside the profiteers, who must by the nature of their case find it hard to believe in the supremacy of God. There are others – journalists, novelists, scientists and teachers and writers, who mould post-war thought – who went through a bitter experience in these four years. Others have suffered in the aftermath of war. The events they have passed through have bitten deeply. They find it hard to deify history or to interpret the war as an event pointing to the nature of divine reality. The best they can make of life is that the universe goes on its mysterious way, heedless of man's need and struggle, leaving it to ourselves to set our house in order if we can, with the example of the war behind us and the promise of another to come if we do not profit by our experience and exercise common sense.

But the qualities required by common sense are just justice, righteousness, mercy, goodness, forgiveness and love. Reality is still making the same kind of demands upon us as the prophets proclaimed.

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We live in a certain kind of universe, and the kind of universe we live in reveals the nature of its Creator. God is still a living, this-world God. The moral laws of the prophets are not just useless lumber to be pushed aside in some scientific interpretation of reality, but the very stuff of which reality is made. We live in a *moral* universe. Our scientific knowledge of its external structure will not avail us much if we do not learn that.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS

THE prophetic revelation of God as moral will was the revelation that was given to the Old Testament Jews, but that is far from being all we find in the Bible. We come now to the New Testament and to the revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth. Why is it we hold that God was fully revealed in Him and His nature manifested as forgiving, redeeming love?

Let us form for the moment no theories regarding him. Let us take him, as scholars present him to us, as a clear, historical figure. We have much for which to be grateful to modern scholars but for nothing more than the way in which they have made Jesus of Nazareth live before our eyes. As we have said before, he is probably better known to us to-day than in any other time in history, excluding the period in which he lived. For the moment let us look on him as a man who lived in Palestine two thousand years ago. That is not so very far back in the life of



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our planet. He is almost one of ourselves so far as time goes and the problems he had to deal with are yours and mine.

He was a young Jew, his father a Galilean carpenter. He believed with passionate devotion in the God of his fathers and committed himself to Him utterly, so much so that he died an ugly death about the age of thirty-one, trusting completely to the reality of God and confident not only of His being but of His love. So real to him was God that he appealed to Him with his dying breath against the blindness and cruelty of man. "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," he cried, and in great faith launched himself into the darkness which he believed was light.

So Jesus of Nazareth lived and died.

Men have been troubled by that life and death and faith ever since. They have tried his way of living and, if few of them have gone all the way, those who have tried it have found, as he declared they would find, that it was a life of personal power and joy.

There is no doubt at all – it is one of the best attested facts of everyday experience – that to those who try the way of Jesus it is satisfying and joyous. The church composed of the followers of Jesus requires no further justification for its existence as a

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practical institution in a practical world than to be able to say, "Live as the Master lived, in faith in God and in love to man, and you will know peace and happiness." But that is not the whole of Christianity. Its complete justification is not that it brings to men a psychological satisfaction, but rather that it is so grounded in God as to be ultimately real, with issues and satisfactions not for this world only but for all eternity. It is this claim on eternal truth by which it stands or falls. It is not only pragmatic – that is, something which works – it is philosophic, or explanatory, making the claim that we live in a certain kind of universe which will justify and ultimately vindicate a certain kind of life.

It is this claim of Christianity to reveal ultimate truth which is a difficulty to many. It may be, for all we have said about the activity of God, that surrender to God is surrender to a great illusion. It may be that there is no God and that living in faith is only a better practical way than that of living in faithlessness. It may be that living in love is a better way than living in hate, but the universe is quite indifferent. The sun shines on the just and the unjust, perhaps not because God is love but just because it shines. There may be nothing or no one beyond ourselves to vindicate our faith or to approve our love. We certainly do not *see* anyone and it is hard

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to stake everything, as Jesus of Nazareth did, on the unseen.

But what was the outcome of Jesus' great faith that led him to the cross? Was there no answer to that faith but a bleak silence? If it had been that, there would have been no Christian church. The life of Jesus of Nazareth was wonderful in its beauty, and his thoughts on God and the destiny of man went far beyond the minds of his contemporaries, but it was not these alone that gave us the Christian church. Certainly they did not win over the apostle Paul or rally his scattered disciples after his crucifixion. If we stop there we simply stop at the supreme martyrdom of man. We believe that the final allegiance of his disciples to him and the adherence of the Pharisee Paul to his cause were not primarily because of his good life or his supreme faith in God, but because something happened that vindicated him in their eyes.

But before we come to that, let me say this. I do think, even though Jesus had not been so vindicated by God, his life would still have set us the task of interpreting Reality in terms of his personality. What kind of universe is this in which such an one as Jesus comes into being? Who made it, and what light does Jesus throw on the nature of its creator?

We are back to the question of the star and the

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astronomer again, back to ourselves and Jesus as one of ourselves. But we are back to it on a higher plane. "What think ye of Christ?"

The personality of Jesus is central to our thinking about God. If God is not like Jesus, how did Jesus come to be in the universe He created? If there is no God at all but mere blind impersonal force behind the phenomena of the universe, how did a personality like that of Jesus emerge? From what or whom does it emerge? The only satisfactory answer to these problems is surely that the Spirit of the universe is the Spirit of Christ, otherwise he could never have come into being at all. He is a fact of the universe more significant than any other fact, a revelation of the real nature of Reality.

We might therefore *infer* that God is like Jesus and, being loving like him, draw the further inference that He is solicitous for our good and desires to bring us into blessedness now or hereafter.

But we believe that there is something more in Christianity than that. We believe that God was not impassive in the drama of Jesus of Nazareth but an active mover in it. He did not leave men to draw inferences from the life of a good or perfect man. He vindicated that life. He not only gave him peace and joy and power so that he in his own life was conscious of His holy Spirit, but He finally manifested

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His complete and active approval of his love and faith in that He raised him from the dead.

In the resurrection of Jesus we hear the final word of God, spoken against all the denials of men, "This is My beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him." We see God seeking to reveal Himself to man, to him who has eyes to see and a heart to understand.

Jesus' life was the God-vindicated life. His faith was not faith in an illusion but faith in Almighty God. It was faith in the nature of things. Therefore there came to his disciples the conviction that in Jesus' way of living they found the way to God and had experience of God. *He* was at one with God, and those who lived in his way were at one with God also. The good life was the life which God vindicated. Jesus had triumphed. God was love. In him they saw the Father.

The resurrection of Jesus is a demonstration of the nature of God and of the eternal quality of the good life. It surpasses death. It is grounded in God and, grounded in God, it has possibilities extending as far as the depths of God's nature. It is the life of union with God and so partakes of His power and joy and beauty. It is not only psychologically satisfying but eternally real. The *quality* of eternal life is made manifest in Jesus.

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That quality is made manifest in the redeeming acts of Jesus. We see His whole life as an act of redemption, in thought, word, and deed. We see in Him what seems to us to be an over-plus of energy spending itself freely for the temporal and eternal good of men, but which is for God a manifestation of His inexhaustible sufficiency. It is in that light we must regard the miracles of Jesus. The divine spirit is not straitened. God has not used Himself up in the creation and maintenance of the world. There is inexhaustible power in the living God which seeks to pour itself out in beneficence to man. Jesus forces us to give up our notion of the universe as a closed system and to feel the power of the living God who is above all things and in them and expressing His own nature as redeeming love in every channel open to His grace. In Jesus we see the redemptive activity of God. We behold the Father. We break through phenomena to the God behind the phenomena and find Him revealed not as Universal Indifference but as Redemptive Love.

It is the life surrendered to the God so revealed and which is energised by the redemptive spirit that possessed the Man of Nazareth which is the Christian life and that is life indeed.

The Christian life, therefore, is the life of union with God, the life of the surrendered will and mind

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and heart to the goodness and truth and beauty we find in Jesus. It is a this-worldly life in so far as it seeks to do God's will in the circumstances surrounding us here and now. It is an other-worldly life in so far as it finds its meaning in the nature of God and our own eternal oneness with Him through Christ. Death does not sever that fellowship. Only sin can do that and sin is alienation from God here and hereafter. God is the living God on both sides of the grave. We cannot have fellowship with Him if we do the works of darkness. Our present and ultimate good is to be reconciled to Him, and it is this good we endeavour to achieve in the fellowship and worship and service of the church.

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THE reality and activity of God preached by the Old Testament prophets and now fully revealed in Christ brought to men a new realisation of life's possibilities. After His resurrection their religion was transformed. From being *this*-worldly, it became *other*-worldly. It was not that they lost their sense of God in history, but the possibilities of life were so elevated that they looked with confidence *beyond* the confines of this world for the consummation of their faith. God's love for them and their response to His love set new horizons to their lives. Life was bounded, not by the physical but by the spiritual, by the omnipotent love of the Father of their spirits now fully revealed in Christ.

Their expectations were thrown beyond the grave. Because God was love, they believed, and the resurrection of Jesus guaranteed their belief, that



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this incomplete life of striving and faith was but a prelude to a complete life of sight and fellowship. So the other world became the desirable world. There their fellowship with Christ would be renewed. Because God was Christ's, and had caused Him to triumph, He would cause His disciples to triumph. They were His friends, His workmanship, those for whom He had given Himself to the utmost, and, for His sake, God would raise them also from the dead to rejoice in His everlasting presence.

"Because I live, ye shall live also" (John xiv. 19). "I am the resurrection and the life: he that cometh unto me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John xi. 25-26). These were the promises, and God who had vindicated Jesus would redeem His promises.

Such a faith, based on the love of God to Jesus and His people, was rational and is rational and is the faith of the church to-day.

I know of no other claim on eternal life but that we are vindicated and accepted by God as Christ's friends. When we are at one with Him not through any lip acknowledgment but through a real acknowledgment of Him as the Lord of our life, God will do for us what He did for Him. Our fellowship with Him is not of our merits, for we have none, but of

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His love and our humble surrender to that love. He could own us or disown us. He owns us and makes us partners in His triumph because love such as His refuses itself to no man. We need but come and, with a whole heart, surrender to His leadership and we are not refused. "He that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." That may seem too good to be true, but any other interpretation of our relationship is false. It is not what we *are* that matters, but what He *is*. He is Lord of Life, the perfect Son of the Perfect Father and the fullness of His perfection is revealed in the fullness of His love. Without Him, we are weak and lost. Our self-sufficiency is our insufficiency. Without Him there is no victory over sin and death. Apart from Him there is no reconciliation to God, no peace and no promise. It is not that God is not willing to forgive us, but apart from Him we do not know He is willing to forgive. There is no certainty, no freedom, no rejoicing in a new status with the Holy One. In Christ He reveals Himself, offers us pardon, receives us and restores us into fellowship. It is all there in the parable of the prodigal son, but who told us the parable and who gave us the certainty that it was true but Christ, the Revealer and the Reconciler, who in Himself was the loving Father, for in His heart was the love of God?

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The blessedness of this reconciliation is not only the blessedness of knowing that our sin is done away and that we are friends of Christ, but it is also the blessedness of knowing that we are sharers of His victory. We are forgiven and reconciled that we might live the life of God, life with all its fullness and promise and that life is not temporal but eternal. To be at one with God is to be at one with Him for ever. Love does not love only to destroy; it loves to create itself in the other.

Such was the good news of Jesus Christ and the experience of those who found Him.

It must not discompose us if we find that the New Testament saints who shared this experience expressed their other-worldly expectations in the language of their time. They could not do otherwise. They had to express their thoughts in the scientific or philosophic categories of their day, as Jesus Himself had to do. But it is one thing to be restricted in one's categories of thought and it is another thing to know God in Christ.

For our better understanding of the scriptures, we may turn for a moment to the "science" of their day in which they had to express their convictions.

The New Testament saints, in common with the prophets before them and with believers everywhere up till the time of Galileo and many a long day

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after, thought of the universe as a three-story universe, and it will help us to understand what is passing and what is permanent in the Christian revelation if we try to see the world as they saw it. For they had to use the "science" of their day if they were to think at all and equate their religious expectations with the mental world they lived in.

Right from Old Testament times the universe was regarded as a three-story structure. Above the earth there was the firmament, the habitation of God, surmounted by the great waters which were the fountains of the floods and rains. Then there was the earth itself, given as a habitation to the children of men. Beneath the earth there was Sheol or Hades, a dark cavern which was the abode of all departed spirits. The whole was supported on mighty waters.

References to a universe of this structure are easily found in the Bible. We all at school learned the second commandment, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." The Book of Psalms simply assumes such a structure, as, for example, Psalm xxiv, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas

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and established it upon the floods.” In the Book of Revelation we are given a picture of the throne of God in the heavens, surrounded by thunders and lightnings and a great shining sea. This conception of the structure of the universe persisted right into the eighth century, when the Apostles’ Creed was finally framed. Christ, when He was buried, “descended into Hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into Heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”

From the Book of Genesis, when God made a firmament in the midst of the waters, to the Apostles’ Creed from which we have just quoted, the structure of the universe was the same, a three-story structure of heaven and earth and Hades. It is difficult to see how men in these days could have thought about the universe in any other way. They had just the evidence of their eyes. The rains and the floods came from above; therefore there must be a reservoir of mighty waters there. Lightning and storm and the fertile sunshine came from the sky with devastating or beneficial results to men; therefore God was up there controlling them. Water spouted from the ground; therefore the earth was founded on water. Underneath its surface there were subterranean fires, breaking forth in earthquake and

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volcano. When men died they were buried in the ground and their spirits departed. Ghosts walked abroad; they must therefore live somewhere in the bowels of the earth.

Such was the "science" of pre-Christian times and into such a "science" the prophetic revelation had to accommodate itself. As a revelation of the living God, it flooded this conception of the universe with meaning. As the revelation progressed, earth became the arena of an intense combat between good and evil, between the will of God and the will of wayward men. Heaven was the eternal abode of the forgiven and vindicated saints and to Hades were consigned the apostate and the wicked. Through the strength of men's religious convictions the structure of the universe was moralised. Such was the position when Christ came. "Science" was made the servant of men's religious apprehensions and faith was able to think in "scientific" terms.

This old-time "science" or cosmogony can be traced all through the Bible, is latent in our Psalms and, indeed, many of our hymns, and is the basis on which were framed the old-time creeds. What are we to do about it?

We must simply regard it as the setting into which Revelation had to fit but not as Revelation itself. We do not throw away a rich jewel as worthless

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because its *setting* is old-fashioned. We may either use it in its old setting or place it in a new setting. That depends very largely on our temperament. If we are so sophisticated that we cannot think historically, we may frame new creeds and write new hymns to express our conviction that God is revealed in Christ, and for some people that may be a real help. But we cannot rewrite the Bible, or repudiate many of our old-time hymns, without throwing away as worthless some classical religious jewels.

When all is said and done, Christianity did not begin yesterday. It is no new thing. The faith in which we share goes back to the time of Abraham and has been expressed in symbols which bear the mark of every age. Every great and good mind who has lived by it has expressed it in his own language. It speaks to us with the authority of experience. It may be good for us that in many ways it still presents itself to us in old thought-forms that it may challenge our sluggish souls with the authority of experience. It is bad for a man that his mind should be active and his soul be dead.

What the Bible, our hymns and our creeds are trying to do is to present to our rather dull minds and still more stubborn hearts the grace and the love of the living God. This revelation is a revelation in history, even ancient history. We must not expect

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to find it embedded in a modern scientific setting. The only reason for rejecting the revelation itself is the indescribably foolish notion that the past is worthless and that since the Great War we have had to wash everything out and try again. Many do seem to believe this, which is one of the reasons why the churches are neglected and the Bible unread ("It is *so* old-fashioned"), but the experience of the churches and of the Bible is an experience of life which men continue to neglect to their infinite impoverishment.

One of the tasks before the church to-day is, undoubtedly, to express its experience and convictions in the language of the present time. That is being done both from the pulpit and in religious literature and over the wireless. But to understand the convictions of the church needs more than a casual attention. It needs the surrender of the whole man to Christ. We understand Christ through our experience of Him, not through what others try to tell us of Him, for they cannot tell us adequately.

When we start from experience we easily learn to be more hospitable in our minds to the classics of our faith. That is not begging the question. We find we understand the classics better because we understand the men who wrote them. We not merely hear what they are trying to say and judge



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it critically, but we know what they are trying to say and enter into it sympathetically. The Bible, our creeds and our hymns are all experiential writings, and it takes experience to understand them.

Even the "outsider" or the seeker needs to be more patient and hospitable in his mind. In dealing with the sincere convictions of other men we have nothing to gain by impatience except false pride. Granted that the seeker accepts with eagerness all that modern scientific men have to tell him about the structure of the universe, that is no reason why he should close his eyes to the fact that the prophets of Israel had a real apprehension of God, or close his heart to the grace and love of Christ of Nazareth. A full acceptance of discovery and revelation are by no means incompatible. Perhaps at the bottom they are both one. We know because God has given us the faculty of knowing and wishes us to know. We hear because He speaks. It is the conviction of Christian men that He not only speaks to us in the order and beauty of the world around us, but in the events of history and in the love of His Son.

If we are to hear God speaking, let us stop thinking of cosmogony when we read the Bible, and get through to the experience of the men who gave us the Bible. Then we shall find our kinship with them and the manner of their thinking will not matter

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very much. Jesus crowned their experience as He crowns our own. In Him was the wisdom, the beauty and the love of God revealed. They found all "worth" in Him, and in His own right as the perfect revealer and reconciler He became the object of their worship. So we find "worth" in Him and, therefore, worship Him also. Let us deal in centralities and not in irrelevancies, lest we fail to find that "worth" and live our lives in darkness.

In Jesus the Spirit of the universe is revealed in human life. Such is the conviction of the church. In finding, in His life, His suffering love for men and the deathless quality of His spirit, the revelation of God; in seeing in Him the true nature of man; in believing in union with Him in a blessed destiny for surrendered and forgiven men and women – the church has no need to apologise for its faith. As a matter of fact, as of old, the church is out-thinking the pagan world of to-day. In so far as it reproduces in its members the spirit of Christ, it is out-living it also.

The revolt against the church, therefore, as being "unscientific," is based upon a misconception of the church's function. It is not the function of the church to bring men to a scientific conception of the universe. Intellectualism is not everything. The function of the church is to bring men to God.

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There are thousands of men and women inside and outside the church who will never attain to a conception of the universe that is worthy of the name "scientific" but who have potentialities for the Christ-like life which must not wait upon the cultivation of their intellect.

We find meaning in life as we find God, and God is not found in a series of ratiocinations, or formal reasonings, but in Jesus Christ. I am not depreciating the work of scientific men. Far from it. Nor am I depreciating the claims of the intellect to understand this universe in which we live. But our first need is not to understand the universe but to be reconciled to God. That the life of goodness is irreconcilable with the world of truth is not the contention of the church, but it does not wait upon a full knowledge of truth to carry out its ministry of reconciliation. We all "see through glass darkly," but when we know love, we know God.

It is by the light of Jesus we must all live, and it is that light which the church seeks to shed upon the world. The church does not exist to oppose to the conclusions of scientific men its own conception of the universe. It exists to declare its conception of God, which is not derived from "science," and not even opposed to it, but is founded solely on Christ, its Lord.

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The church is not committed to the doctrine of heaven and hell in so far as this doctrine was founded on the old cosmogony. It is committed to the doctrine that God is revealed in Christ. For the rest, it does not say any more than Christ says, nor can it. Even as regards the life beyond the grave, it can say no more, nor needs to say more, than that God is eternal love. It is not satisfied curiosity but satisfied faith that gives us peace and power in our daily living. Our faith is satisfied in Christ. To know Him is to know God. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent" (John xvii. 3). To live Christ's life of goodness is to know the life of God. "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God" (1 John iv. 16). Such a life involves continuance. It is involved in the absolute, or timeless, existence of God, but where and how beyond the grave we do not know.

The Christian life is a here-and-now life with other-worldly implications and consequences. Its character and quality on earth we know from Jesus Christ and from our fellowship with Him, and we believe that it will be of similar character and quality in the world that lies beyond. The spirit of Christ was the spirit of Reality. Those who live in that spirit are at one

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with God. They share in the life which is eternal.<sup>1</sup>

We cannot think of God destroying any partner to such a spiritual union. Indeed we find the whole meaning and purpose of life *in* such a union, begun here in time with a view to its perfection in eternity. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt. v. 48). Such an injunction puts meaning into existence but in itself is meaningless if death is the end of all things. It involves a goal which is God Himself and where extinction finds no place.

That the possibilities of life extend beyond the grave Christ took for granted. He could not conceive of His own extinction, nor did He believe that it was the will of God for others. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke xii. 32). Out of His conviction of the reality of God and the goodwill of God to men, He encouraged others to live in great faith and expectation. He was constantly astonished

<sup>1</sup> Eternal life is a great mystery. If we could know who or what God is, we should know what eternal life is. The moral nature of God we know from Christ. The manner of His existence we do not know. The relative, which is ourselves, cannot comprehend the Absolute, which is God. The fact that God is love and we are His creatures allows us to enter into moral relationships with Him, but we cannot "grasp" Him. He is not an object among other objects which can be held before the mind. But the mystery of the life of God is a fruitful mystery, heightening our capacity for life in the drawing forth of our powers of courage, love and faith. Do we not find that significance in the life of Jesus?

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at men's lack of faith. He was amazed at their pessimism, their want of belief in themselves, their irreligious doubtings and hesitations at the possibilities of life.

His own faith was staggering. He believed that the story of His life would never die, that His crucifixion was the will of God, that He would rise from the dead, and that the work He had begun in this obscure corner of the Roman Empire would one day sweep the world. He believed in all these things because He believed mightily in God. They were founded on the nature and will of God. It was this man of the imperial mind and the dauntless spirit and the unquenchable faith who looked beyond the boundaries of death and saw through the darkness into glorious light. It was He who was vindicated, and His vindication gave us the gospel.

He saw a fuller life awaiting man, a life of moral and spiritual quality, where earth's distinctions were surpassed in a free spiritual fellowship, where there was neither marriage nor giving in marriage but all were as the saints of God. He saw a life of wider service and of deeper joy, where men who had been faithful over a few things were made rulers over many things. He saw there the ultimate consummation of all friendship and love. "I go to prepare a place for you . . . that where I am there ye may be

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also" (John xiv. 2, 3). He was a great poet, but He did not speak in poetic raptures. Some of His greatest utterances fell almost casually from His lips in friendly talks to His disciples or in encouragement to total strangers. Out of His great sanity of mind He spoke, with clear eyes that saw a cross before Him, but with a spirit that was at one with the purposes of God. He was not deceived about life. His experience left Him no chance of such deception. He knew what it was to toil, to be poor, to be hungry, to be persecuted, to suffer. He did not take wings from the world of reality into a world of fancy. But He believed that this very world in which He Himself bore a cross was God's world and that the life He shared with men had meaning and purpose in it. That meaning and purpose were found in a loving God. In living the life of love He knew a divine fellowship. Even here and now that fellowship raised Him out of mystery into an experience of an eternal quality – of light and joy and peace.

Against such experience, shared by the followers of Christ, our conception of the structure of the universe matters little. It is only God that matters, now or beyond the stars. Of the church Christ is the supreme King and Head. We do not worship the questionable deductions of man's intellect. We worship Him

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and follow Him because in Him we find God and God finds us. We hope in Him because He conquered and shares with us His victory.

In contrast to the other-worldly expectations of our forefathers I think it clarifies the issue to say that, whereas their other-worldly home was a place, ours is a Person. They looked to the joy of heaven. We look to the joy of God. God is more real than any compartment of the universe. Where God is, heaven is. Heaven is present here and now, if we live in God here; and to live in God is to live in love. Heaven is life hereafter in His continued presence. *How* we exist in that presence we do not know, but we believe with Jesus we *shall* exist.

The question emerges, however, What is the fate of those who turn away from God here and now and live selfish, egocentric lives? Does death end all or is there another chance in the world beyond the grave? It behoves us to speak carefully on a matter on which we have so little knowledge. It may be that death brings annihilation for some men. Jesus spoke of some men as dead while they were living. The divine life had flickered out and died. It may be that there is retribution, the kind of retribution our forefathers envisaged when they worked out the doctrine of hell. But surely retribution, to be consonant with the love and mercy of God, must be



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redemptive and not merely vindictive. The fate of the unrepentant sinner may be either annihilation or complete exclusion from God's presence. But such annihilation or exclusion must be self-annihilation or self-exclusion. It is not the will of God.

We believe, as Christ most surely believed, that life has consequences not only here but hereafter. God is a moral God, and fellowship with Him is not enjoyed by those who deny His nature. The lazy tolerance of to-day is not the outcome of thought but of the absence of thought. It is not the result of religious conviction but the result of no conviction. Our modern indifference to the other-worldly issues of life is not the consequence of Jesus' proclamation that God is love, therefore universal tolerance, but the absence of recognition of what communion with love involves. That God is love is *inclusive* as far as God is concerned. It is *exclusive* as far as we are concerned. Unless we live in love we cannot enjoy His presence. His requirements, quite literally, are awful.

Apart from the atoning work of Christ, there is no surety that we shall enter and enjoy God's holy presence. He holds the title deeds and bestows them on us, but without Him we can make no claim. In one sense, the Kingdom of God belongs to us, for we were made for God and are His children. In another sense, we cannot claim our birthright, for we have

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forfeited our standing as sons by our slavery to ourselves. This is not juggling with words; it is being true to our own experience as sinful men and women. The man who does not see himself as a sinner has not seen Jesus Christ.

We enter into the life of God not through our merits but through the grace of our Lord and Saviour. In His identification with us, and by our surrender to Him in receptive faith, we find our at-one-ment with the Father. How humble we should be, yet how rejoicing. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us . . . that we be no more strangers but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God."

That is the heart of the theology of Paul, and, while we may reject many elements in his thought which belonged to his age, we may not reject his experience, which belongs to every age. We may boast of a fuller knowledge of the physical universe in which we live, but we must stand very humbly before his knowledge of the spiritual universe in which we live. Science, with all its wealth of understanding of external reality, has little to tell us of reconciliation to God. Christianity has everything to tell us, and, deep down in their hearts, for all their neglect and criticism of the church, that is the message men want to hear.

Sir James Y. Simpson, the discoverer of chloroform,

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was one of the leading scientists of his day. He made many important discoveries. One day a friend asked him what was the greatest discovery he had ever made. "The greatest discovery I ever made," he replied reverently, "was the discovery I had a Saviour." Sir James was wise enough to know that we live in two worlds, a physical and a moral world. The physical world was created by God, and it is our great privilege in exploring that world to think His thoughts after Him and to enter into the wisdom by which it has been created. The moral world we create for ourselves in creating ourselves. No man who looks on Jesus Christ can be satisfied with his own creation. Unhappy is the man who sees Him only as Revealer. To see Him as that only is to despair. To know Him as Redeemer and Re-creator is to rejoice with joy unspeakable.

"When we call Him Saviour, we call Him by His name."

## THE SECULAR DENIAL

**A** GAINST THE FAITH and experience of the church to-day stands the widespread denial of secularism.

Secularism, or a this-worldly attitude to life, is as much a mood as a philosophy. It is spiritual pessimism or indifference which may or may not rationalise itself. Some take their stand against the church on "scientific grounds." Others because they are attracted by the "this-worldly" faith of Karl Marx and his school. But many more belong to no school and simply neglect the church by reason of their own worldliness. All repudiate by conviction or by practice the church's other-worldliness. They are interested in this life up to the point of death. What comes beyond that leaves them indifferent. If there be anything, they just trust to luck that they will get through all right. Luck is the guiding star of all those who do not wish to think, and they are many.

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The faith of the church is the faith of men who have not refused to think. Its other-worldliness has a long history of thought behind it. The facts of life have challenged men to think them through to some reasonable conclusion. It might help us to treat the thought of the Bible with more respect if we try to trace its sequence.

In Old Testament times men were intensely race or state conscious, just as they are in Germany or Russia to-day. They believed in the possibilities of the race or of the community, not in the possibilities of the individual soul. Let us start from that point, for that is exactly the faith of many men to-day.

Thinking, as they did, in terms of the community, the problem of individual justice had no sharp edge for these thinkers of Old Testament days. A man was blessed as he partook of the prosperity of the race. He was unhappy as he shared in the general misfortune of the community. The unit was the social unit, not the individual man.

Is there not something very modern about all this?

This identification of the individual with the fortunes of the social whole turned the edge also of the problem of personal survival after death. The individual had no clear-cut, separate personality, so, if the social unit survived, he survived in it if he left behind him heirs to share in the fortunes of the

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community. This is the origin of the queer custom the Jews had, whereby, if a man died, his widow married his next-of-kin and raised up children to carry on his name (Luke xx. 33). The old Israelites, like the state ideologists of to-day, believed in a good time coming. They believed also that when they died they personally were cut off from the coming blessedness but had the consolation they would participate in it through their children. The Israelites and the present-day communists would have understood each other very well. Need we remind the reader that Karl Marx was a Jew?

A man fulfilled himself by pouring the little stream of his transient life into the greater, ever-flowing life-stream of the state. If he was fortunate enough to possess children who would share in the coming glory, he was blessed.

I do not see that a man can go much further with a this-world creed, and I admire the altruism of it, but let us notice this – it rested on a defective or undeveloped sense of personality, as our modern state and race ideologies also do. A man was not an end in himself. He was simply a means to the enrichment of the communal whole.

Now, this doctrine of corporate personality or defective individuality, with its acquiescence in personal extinction or, at most, banishment to a

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shadowy existence in an underworld, had to reckon eventually with man's growing sense of his own worth and especially with the conception of his personal relationship to God. Israel had its saints, its heroes, its prophets and its priests. They not only inculcated the sense of individual worth in others but they themselves were of individual worth, not only to the race but to God. Sooner or later, men had to ponder the question, What is the destiny of the individual? Does God just blot him out or banish him to Sheol? If He does that, is He altogether righteous and loving as the prophets and saints declared Him to be?

How did the Hebrews solve the problem?

God was the living God and a righteous God, so the prophets declared, and so history manifested. If His sway were so universal that He could use mighty nations such as Assyria and Babylon as instruments of His purpose, did it not extend also to the shadowy realm of Hades? If that were so, when He vindicated Israel, would He not bring back the saints and prophets from the shades to enjoy the blessings of His Kingdom? So the hope of a resurrection arose and gradually crystallized. Here was the solution of the problem which did justice to individual worth and God's righteousness and goodness.

This resurrection, however, was to the glories of

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a new earth and not to an other-worldly heaven. It was as though the communists believed in a return of Marx and Lenin to enjoy the world triumph of communism. But the Hebrews believed that the new earth was to be established by God and not by man. Heaven was still distant, the abode of God, and earth was the real and potential habitation of the children of men. If men were to enjoy the presence of God, it would be when God cleansed the earth to make it fit for His presence and came down from heaven and established His community in their midst. The New Jerusalem would come down from heaven and those who were cleansed and saved would enter into it. Those who were isolated in Sheol would be brought back to enjoy it. The wicked only would be left there or perhaps with the wicked on earth brought up to share in the final destruction.

Such was the condition of thought among the Jews at the close of the Old Testament. Just about this time, however, hardly earlier than 100 B.C., the conviction emerged that this earthly plane was too meagre and unsatisfying ever to be an eternal theatre for the manifestation of God's glory, and a deepening apprehension of the power, wisdom, holiness and beauty of God forced men to believe that all the requirements of His kingdom could not be satisfied within the limitations of this earthly plane. If the



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coming Kingdom were to be the Kingdom of the everlasting God and to display His glory, earth must be done away in a new constitution of things fit for the Divine Majesty and worthy of being a home for the new community.

Such was the thought of the orthodox Jews in the time of Jesus. The doctrine of immortality had forced itself to the front through hundreds of years of speculation. It was not want of thought but intensity of thought that made men believe in a resurrection from the dead.

The Jewish thought on immortality, which the Christian church inherited, filled full by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and endorsed by His resurrection, ought to be sufficient indication that it is not a drug invented by cunning churchmen to serve the ends of a capitalist society, if the thoughtless *knew* its history. But men with no historical background to their thinking, or who have had their thinking done for them, have been easily persuaded by Marx and his school that there is something sinister in the church's faith. It has had an ulterior motive, that of keeping them contented with their conditions on earth by the promise of a blessedness in heaven. The church has been the tool of the ruling classes, and this sop of immortality has been a mean trick played on the working classes in the interests of their masters.

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Here is a classical statement of this point of view made by Lenin:

“Religion is one of the forms of spiritual oppression. . . . The helplessness of the exploited classes in their struggle with the exploiters just as inevitably generates faith in a better life beyond the grave as the helplessness of the savage in his struggle with nature produces faith in gods, devils, miracles, etc. To him who works and is poor all his life, religion teaches passivity and patience in earthly life, consoling him with the hope of a heavenly reward. To those who live on the labour of others, religion teaches benevolence in earthly life, offering them a very cheap justification for all their exploiting existence and selling tickets to heavenly happiness at a reduced price.”<sup>1</sup>

All this is in keeping with the teaching of Marx, who in 1843 in a letter to a friend expressed himself as follows:

“The struggle against religion is . . . indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma religion is. . . . The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is the demand for its *real* happiness. The demand to surrender illu-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Prof. John Baillie in *And the Life Everlasting* (p. 35).

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sions about its conditions is a demand to surrender the conditions which *need* illusions.”<sup>1</sup>

Undeniably the Orthodox church in Russia was linked with the state and supported the interests of the ruling classes. Taken as a whole, it probably deserved its repudiation by the people. But this link with the state, powerful though it was, was only an incidental of one church's life, not an essential in every church's life. Churches live and flourish with no link with the state and proclaim their faith to the world when the rich and powerful pass them by.

Christ believed in immortality when He was crucified by the state backed by the rich and powerful, and it is Christ who gives us the church's faith. The early Christians, the Huguenots in France, the Covenanters in Scotland, the Wesleyans in England, the Confessional church in Germany, all have evinced their faith in immortality, with nothing at all to gain from the ruling classes. Marx has twisted history to suit a theory, and his followers have been content to have it so.

In reality, it is Marx who has tricked the workers of the world. He has tricked them out of their religious faith into a dismal philosophy of life which has narrowed down their expectations to material

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satisfactions. He was quite sincere, no doubt, but history is full of examples of men who were quite sincere and quite wrong. The world has moved past them into truth and it will do so again.

The this-world Utopians who have been led by Marx have accepted a conception of life and its meaning which men discarded through the sheer pressure of thought before the advent of Jesus Christ. In his philosophy of life, Marx is definitely reactionary.

When Jesus in His teaching, life and resurrection, revealed, as no one had done before Him, the nature of God and the real worth of human personality, He definitely began a new era in men's thought. He made it impossible for those who believed in Him to think of their lives otherwise than in other-worldly terms. He preached a Kingdom in which men were ends and not means. Each man was loved by God. He sought out the single sheep, the single coin, the single son. His Kingdom was a kingdom of moral worth, which means a kingdom of individuals, for moral action is the action of free and responsible men and women. The individual was made for moral life, and through the conscious exercise of his freedom in serving moral ends he realised himself in God. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" is not an injunction

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to individual moral athleticism but an invitation to share in a spiritual life which can be shared by all. It is individual and communal. It is an invitation to share in the life of God.

But this complete realisation of the ends of life cannot be perfected here by the individual, and not even by the community, for the earth is transitory; so that the Kingdom of God is a this-worldly and also an other-worldly Kingdom, manifested in time and perfected in eternity.

Such is the faith of the church.

How far the secular denial of that faith is created by communistic doctrine bred by a sense of social injustice, or by determinist science, or by sheer worldliness, it is difficult to estimate. There are misconceptions in the denial, and much worldliness, no doubt, but it is not all moral turpitude and perversity. The fight for the establishment of a better social order to-day, which has largely produced the denial, is a real fight and is calling out some of the highest qualities of man. The capacity to suffer for a cause, happiness in service, sacrifice for others, the vision of a community freed from poverty, ignorance and injustice, are not evidences of turpitude or perversity, and these are the qualities of many secular visionaries. But they have still to face the questions, Is man an end in himself or only

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a means to an end? And if he is an end in himself, what is his end?

Christ gave the answers to these questions long ago when He proclaimed the love of God to the individual man and his potentiality of spiritual perfection. That this perfection can only be attained in a perfected community is as much the teaching of Christ as it is of Karl Marx. The foundation of His preaching is the Kingdom of God. But His conception of the individual's worth is much deeper than that of Marx, and His conception of the community is much richer. It is because of this glory and beauty of the ultimate end of human life (and He Himself illustrates that glory and beauty), and because of the depth and richness of His knowledge of God, who created man for fellowship with Him in a community perfected in love, that Jesus had to think of the individual's destiny in other-worldly terms.

That end is none other than sharing the fellowship of our divine Maker, and membership of the community is none other than membership of His perfected Kingdom. Jesus Christ takes up the conception of society where Karl Marx lays it down, and carries it into a realm of ultimate spiritual values.

The real issue between Christianity and communism is not with the latter's doctrine of a perfected social order but with the this-worldly restriction of

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that doctrine. The communist contends that the Christian's other-worldliness has made him indifferent to social injustice. The Christian contends that the communist's preoccupation with social theory has blinded him to the individual's real nature as a child of God. The communist's indictment of the churches has been misplaced. It should have been made, not against their other-worldliness, but against their worldliness. The other-worldliness of Christians has not made them indifferent to the claims of justice, but their worldliness often has. It is in their attitude to *this*-worldliness that they have not always been true to Christ. His example and teaching are not a refutation of the world. They are a refutation of worldliness. He believed in the exercise of justice, mercy, forgiveness, compassion and love in present-day conditions because they were the attributes of the living God, and such were the qualities He demanded of men. He did not reject the world and its possibilities, but He did not restrict Himself to the world and its possibilities. He heightened the issues of life as no other has heightened them. But He did reject worldliness, and His followers have not always accepted that rejection. It was not the other-worldly element in the life of Jesus which gave communism its chance. It was the worldly element in the lives of His followers.

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Neither can the charge of communist thought against the churches, that other-worldliness is "dope," be borne out by an examination of the lives of other-worldly men. Shaftesbury, Wilberforce, Charles Kingsley and William Booth, to take a few typical names of the last century, were other-worldly men, but they were by no means indifferent to social injustice. If Karl Marx was in revolt, they also were in revolt. They were as much concerned with the social problems of their time as he was. But to understand Marx and the significance of *his* doctrine, we must remember that, being a Jew, he had the vision of an ordered and planned society. His thought came from an Old Testament mould and, as against the individualism of his contemporaries, he thought in terms of the community. He had the vision, as the Old Testament prophets had, of a redeemed and transfigured social whole. He changed the emphasis of the nineteenth-century reformers. They placed it on the individual. He placed it on society.

The real emphasis is on both. There can be no perfect society till there are perfect individuals, and there can be no perfect individuals until there is a perfect society. The individual is not a unit. He is a member of society. And yet he is not a means to its perfection. He is an end in himself. This end is



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only accomplished when, perfected in his own powers, he takes his proper place in a perfect social whole.

The individualism of last century needed the corrective of Marx. Yet at the same time the communism of Marx needs the corrective of individualism. Man is not perfected by external social forces. He is perfected by the cultivation of his own inner life of righteousness, love and vision. These qualities are exercised within the social structure, but the power to sustain them does not come from the social structure. It comes from God.

God is the fountain of all goodness. Else how did goodness come to be in His universe? It is surely not a meaningless extra. If goodness is not of ultimate worth, what is of ultimate worth? Surely not a society which has no faith beyond itself and which will one day perish in a collapsing world! We must find a home for the moral worth of men and women, and the only absolute, enduring and eternal home is the God revealed in Christ.

It is as we wait on that one true God that our moral ideals are renewed. From Him alone comes the energy to sustain our own lives and the life of society in moral well-being and creativeness.

For full, free, creative living, we need more than a society which seeks the good of the individual. We need individuals who seek the good of society.

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Legislation may do much to improve the social lot, but good legislation needs good men, and the best of legislation will not produce such men. Such men are developed and enriched and sustained by the cultivation of the inner life, by laying themselves open in prayer and worship and meditation to the influence of a Holy God. The church exists for such communion and spiritual creativeness, and the charge of the communist against the church that it has failed society would have had much less weight in it if, in an other-worldly faith, it had exercised its function. Other-worldliness has not failed the church, but worldliness has. It is not that its eyes have been set on heaven but that they have been set on earth.

Yet it is extremely doubtful if the church has failed society so much as the communist alleges. If the enjoyment of material prosperity be the *sine qua non* of happiness undoubtedly the church has failed to emphasise and enforce that truth. But if happiness does not depend on the enjoyment of material possessions but on the kind of men we are, it may be that the church, by its emphasis on charity and kindness and faith and prayer, has served the world better than has hitherto been acknowledged. If to be surrendered to God and to live the life of faith and love is to be happy, then there are

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thousands of Christian men and women within the churches whose lives are not unblessed.

If, however, as Marx alleged, the church, as he thought he knew it, failed society by supporting an unjust social system, he did not penetrate the full measure of its tragedy. For, if the facts were as he alleged them to be, the church not only failed society but it failed Christ. The church is not concerned with the defence of capitalism. It is only concerned with the defence of its faith. If it stood or fell by an economic system, it was standing or falling untrue to its own essential nature as the church of Jesus Christ.

Christianity is not to be identified with any social or economic system. It seeks to save them all by putting its spirit into them. Nor is it a new system men are needing but the release from the pressure of any system into spiritual freedom. The need for personal peace and joy is clamant and pressing. The *exterior* conditions of living press hard on some, but the *interior* conditions of life press much more hard on others, and these are the great majority. Doubt, futility, envy, greed, jealousy, selfishness and covetousness still ruin the lives of thousands. It is because secularism cannot solve these discords that men still turn to Christianity. Christ is the Saviour of society because He is the Saviour of men.

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The church must never lose sight of social injustice just because it must never lose sight of the individual. If *exterior* conditions are oppressing him, it must seek to have them righted. But if *interior* conditions are oppressing him, it must seek to have them righted too. A church with a social gospel only is no church for sinful men. Communism as contrasted with capitalism may only express collective as opposed to individual greed. There is no lasting peace in the spirit of acquisitiveness.

The truth is, that modern secularism, with its emphasis on the temporal well-being of man, does not understand Christianity, because it does not understand man and the needs in him that Christianity meets. Christianity is not simply social amelioration. It is reconciliation to God and the expressing of that reconciliation in a life of love. Jesus was not simply a person who went about doing good. He lived in communion with God and *therefore* went about doing good. There was an inner as well as an outer aspect to His life. Whatever the outer aspect may have been, how much He was frustrated and denied and tortured, in His heart there was always peace.

We shall never enter into the real meaning of Christianity until we realise that it has first to do with God and then with man. It is a religion before

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it is a social programme. Its service is the service of a divine and not a secular order. It is not that it despises the world but believes in it mightily as the sphere of God's workings. It was this world that Jesus died to save. But to save it from what? From the very spirit of selfishness from which it still needs saving. If the communists in their rejection of Christian teaching had studied the Master instead of His followers they might have seen that truth, and Christ might have been leading Russia to-day.

The communists have still to reckon with the Christ that they have missed. Amid the wreckage of ecclesiasticism He still survives. The church in every land in its fight with "the world, the flesh and the devil" has often compromised or fallen. But Christ did not compromise and He did not fall. He still stands in all His significance in every realm of conduct, waiting to be understood, waiting to lead, waiting to show men the Father and to reconcile them to the Father and to one another. It is this inwardness of Christianity that the communist and secularist fail to understand. "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (1 Thess. v. 23). That is a side of life into which secular thought fails to penetrate. If it is aware of it at all, it deems it pietistic and ineffective in the affairs of men. But, in very truth, men's ineffectiveness comes from lack of it. Racked

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by ambition, by hatred, by greed, by want of sympathy for those whose difficulties and experience and ways of living are different from their own, they fail to achieve adjustment either to God or to one another. "My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth give I unto you" (John xiv. 27). So said the Master. It is this peace which Jesus gives, the peace of the fellowship of God, that men are needing if they would work not only with purpose but with serenity for an ordered and peaceful commonwealth of men. For to be at peace with God is not simply to worship Him; it is to love all He loves, and He loves men. To know His joy is not merely to wait in prayer on Him but to find our freedom in serving the ends of righteousness, justice, beauty and truth.

Yet when all is said that has been said, I really do wonder if the communist repudiation of the church in this country, at any rate, goes very deep. It may be social custom, it may be something more, but I find that in the great crises of life those who are avowedly communists still seek the ministrations of the church. I remember once being asked by a young red to take the funeral of his grandmother. Probably he was rather self-conscious but he felt it difficult to be gracious about it. He made it perfectly clear it was for the sake of the womenfolk and

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he was entirely unconcerned. When the service was over, he came and apologised and declared he was coming back to church. He never came to my church, and as he was a stranger and lived out of my district he passed out of my ken. Perhaps his courage failed him. I think there are a lot of secularists who would like to come to church but they have not the courage.

When I left my last church I received a copy of the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* from a working man. It is an expensive book. He had been unemployed for years. He and I often had long talks about things. He was a communist.

A friend of mine some years ago was at a political meeting. It was addressed by a red-hot communist, a very extreme communist. "There is no God!" he shouted. "I tell you there is *no* God! *For God's sake*, don't believe that nonsense!"

I think it was Principal Denney who once said that it was the saving quality of man that he was never quite logical! Or perhaps it was consistent! Never mind! The church has still great work to do in bringing men to God and, as long as men are human, there is always hope that its work will not be finally frustrated. At the risk of appearing muddle-headed, I do not despair of men who are inconsistent and who have an intuitive awareness of God!

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So far we have been dealing with secularism in so far as it has elevated itself into a doctrine of life.

We might almost speak of it as the secularist religion, for it is a kind of religion in its way, purporting to explain life in terms of man's competency to achieve universal satisfaction and happiness. But most of the secularism that sweeps past the doors of the churches is not of this order, though it may have been influenced by it. It is just sheer worldliness. Men neglect the church and all it stands for not because they have thought things out for themselves and have arrived at an alternative philosophy of life, but because they are so much immersed in the interests and satisfactions that this life has to offer that they have never given serious thought at all to its ultimate issues. They have a friendly sentiment towards the church but the issues it raises are just pushed aside while they attend to more immediate satisfactions,



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and in this continual pushing aside of religious issues, they inevitably lose the capacity for attending to them at all.

That is a tragedy I have seen again and again. A man is not against the church. As a matter of inclination, he would prefer to be a church member rather than not to be a church member. He accepts in general the church's attitude to life. He believes the world would be a better place if there were more "Christianity" about. In a dim way, he is on the side of "Christianity." He believes that children ought to be taught "Christianity." He has no objection in the world to their going to Sunday-school. If their mother wishes to take them to church he, himself, will defer the run in the car to let them go. He may go himself on occasion and feel it does him good; but, somehow or other, even in the church, he has lost the capacity to respond. His heart is elsewhere, in his business, among his associates, in the vivid interests of everyday life. He is a practical man, a busy man, a man who has had his ups and downs in the welter of business and who wants, while he has the opportunity, to get a little fun out of life. Sunday is about the only day when he can get that little fun. The relaxation at the week-end makes life just about bearable. Why go and spoil it by tying oneself up to go to church? That is

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other people's idea of "fun." Religion for those who like it.

So the appeal of the church falls on the ears of preoccupied men. They hardly hear it and, even if they did, it seems to deny them what they want from life and they see no reason to reorganise their lives and attend to it. "They make light of it" as men did with the appeal of Jesus. They go their ways, the one to his farm, the other to his merchandise, the other to his pleasures, and only a few hear it as the voice of the eternal God, life calling to life, truth to our capacity for truth, and love to our self-centredness.

To most men this world is clear and distinct. It has tangible satisfactions which are very well apprehended. The church seems to deny these satisfactions and those it offers seem insipid. "Life in Christ" is but a phrase and even the future life is dim and distant. The whole of its teaching seems to be concerned with nebulous things except in so far as it sometimes issues in works of practical philanthropy. Even then, it makes demands on one which are irritating. "The church is always asking for money." Why trouble much about an institution which is difficult to understand and which seems, in some way or other, to deny the interests and satisfactions which lie in the clear, everyday world around us?

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I think that something like the above might fairly represent the attitude of the average man to the question of non-churchgoing.

The task before the church is to convince him that the things it stands for are not world-denying and that they are primary and real.

We admit that the life we live in this modern world is full of interest, and offers many personal satisfactions. So must it have been to men of every age. But the question emerges for every man, what does my life mean? If we could live *without* seeking meaning in life we might have little or no need of the church as the answer to our need. But when we look for meaning in existence—and tragedy of some kind or another sooner or later does force us to seek for meaning—we find the need of the church. Nor is it only tragedy that forces us to seek for meaning; love can do that, or great joy, or a glimpse of beauty. All kinds of things can happen to us which force us to ask the question: Is my life just a jumble of contradictory experiences or has it any rational purpose? When we look for rational purpose in our existence we shall find ourselves drawn to the church.

After all, there is something more to be said about life than that we love and strive, and succeed or fail, and die. We *know* we love; we *know* we strive;

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we *know* we succeed or fail. If it were not for this element of conscious apprehension, success and failure would be just the same thing. We *do* live self-conscious lives and it is this self-consciousness which sets us the task of discovering for ourselves what life is all about; and it sets us also the further task of organising our activities to realise the end or ends of our existence.

In this realm of meaning, people do feel that the church does say something more about the purpose of existence than worldliness in itself says, and therefore they never completely reject its witness. The friendly sentiment with which many, indeed most, non-churchgoers regard the church is an indication of their own incompetence to achieve satisfaction in a completely secular way of living. They are willing to let it direct their lives in great crises, such as birth and marriage and death. But this sentiment in favour of the church has not risen with many to a clear conviction. They live for their own particular, clearly envisaged ends and come to the church only when life's mystery is too much for them.

The average man puts meaning into existence by living for particular ends—for example, promotion in the office, recognition in his profession, the maintenance of his home, success at sport or identification

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with the success of others, or for some form of self-gratification or social service. If he single-mindedly pursues his object, he finds enough meaning to be going on with and is comparatively happy for the time being. But the end attained is a passing satisfaction, and the great question of the purpose of his life as a whole still remains unanswered. He has still to find an ultimate meaning in his existence, a purpose that will illumine and sustain his activities, and give him a place in the scheme of things. How can he find such meaning?

The popular answer to that question is that we find meaning in existence by believing in God or by believing in a future life. The church stands for these beliefs and therefore not to deny the church is to give them a nominal acceptance. But these "beliefs" have little directive power on the average man's activities. They do not persuade him to pray and worship, or to deny this world in favour of the next. God and the future life are dim and distant realities which exist on the horizon of his thought and make but little difference to life's interests and satisfactions here and now.

"Belief" to be coercive or regulative must be related to life. Many people's "beliefs" are wholly unrelated to their living.

The things we live for are the things we believe in,

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and these "over-beliefs" of ours which we fondly imagine are our religious convictions are often mere camouflage which saves us from the trouble of self-scrutiny.

We believe what Jesus believed. Do we? Why don't we live it then? Christianity is a great deal more than believing what Jesus believed. It is living as Jesus lived; and the Christian faith only puts meaning into existence when we live life the Christian way.

What we call the Christian life is a real here-and-now life, not a nominal assent to a then-and-there life. It is an intensely actual way of living, demonstrated by Jesus and reinforced by the example of His followers.

It is only as we live in Christ's way that we find that the spiritual world is not dim and distant. The fellowship of God is real and the moral life is a joyous life. No amount of telling by other people can convince us of that till we make the experiment ourselves. Then the Bible becomes to us more than a *vade-mecum* of beliefs. It speaks to us because it speaks to our own experience. Jesus is known as the Way and the Truth and the Life because He is to *us* the way and the truth and the life. It is our surrender to Jesus' way of living that brings us into fellowship with Him, and as long as that surrender

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is not made we fail to understand Him or the faith through which He triumphed.

The church stands not for certain truths about life but for a certain way of living life, the way of faith and love. The church does not profess to know everything about God and everything about life's ultimate issues. Jesus Himself confessed that there were secrets of the Father hidden from His knowledge and it was the greatest of His followers who confessed that "now we see through a glass darkly." But it does know that God is revealed in Jesus and knows also that the ultimate issues of life are in the hands of God who was so revealed.

Christian men and women know Jesus not through the church's dogmas about Him but through their own experience of His way of living. The church's dogmas are attempts to convey that experience to others in a systematic way, but dogma about Jesus will never bring us to understand Him. Only experience of Him will do that. Life is prior to theology and all the doctrines of Christendom will not save us from futility if we live for futile things.

The church stands for Christ's way of living. It is a Christian fellowship, witnessing in the world, through the life of its members, to the life of Christ. But its witness of the church to the Christian way of living is not so clear as it ought to be. Its ministers preach

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and its members sing of Christian blessedness, but the world at large is not arrested. It is by no means startled to attention and, indeed, in many cases, has difficulty in distinguishing professing Christians from those who stand outside its fellowship.

The truth is that to be a church member does not put meaning into life, and fill one with inward peace. To be a Christian does. Many church members unconsciously live double-minded lives. They own half an allegiance to Christ and half an allegiance to the "world." Their religion pulls them one way and the "world" pulls them in another. They are torn between a religious sentiment and a worldly fascination. Christ Himself has a great deal to say about this divided allegiance. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "No man putting his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God." "Unless a man is ready to say good-bye to all he has he cannot be my disciple." Christianity involves the surrender of the whole personality to the service of God and our fellows. When a life is God-centred it is unified and we do not rest until we rest completely in Him and in His will and service. As F. R. Barry says, "Joy is the music of spiritual harmony." But where there is no harmony there is no joy.

The first demand of Christ for surrender to Him is really an invitation to a great joy. But the surrender



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for many is too hard, for they have not a clear vision of this Master of life. They are absorbed in their own masteries.

It is only when Christ masters us that we master the art of living. When lesser loyalties go, consumed in this great loyalty, then life is flooded by a meaning that transcends our wildest dreams. There is no limit to His purpose for us or for the world, for it is the purpose of the almighty, loving God.

A man's first great need is not to get a clear set of beliefs but to make a great experiment, the experiment of living in faith and love. But the world still wants belief rather than life. It is easier.

There is no substitute for Christianity, not even belief in Christianity. It is a life of redemptive love and as we endeavour to live that life the time we spend in church or on our knees is re-creation.

The task before the church is truly a tremendous one. It is no less than this work of bringing men to Christ and affording them fellowship in the Christian way of living. It is no wonder that many members of the church find the task too heavy and sooner or later retire from it and content themselves with a nominal membership, leaving it to others to undertake it according to their ability.

But the church does not exist for those who have *succeeded* in living in Christ's way but for those who

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are *trying* to live that way. We cannot be too absolute in setting forth Christ's leadership ; we cannot be too tender with those who have accepted His leadership. "A bruised reed shall he not break ; and the smoking flax shall he not quench" (Isa. xlii. 3). Our patience and helpfulness to those who are weak in the faith or in Christian living cannot be too great. Yet the church must not whittle down its demands to meet men's weakness, but rather foster in them a spirit of repentance, courage, and endeavour that they may persist in the venture of faith and in the life of love.

There must be a constant spirit of hopefulness and comradeship in the church. Its life is love. There must be an unremitting endeavour to bring others into its fellowship ; not because the church is a society which needs members and support but because all men are children of God and the church has a true vision of their worth. They are all made for the Christ life and those who have found it *through* love must seek to share it *by* love. If we do not share, it is not love that we have found. We may be members of the church but we are not members of Christ.

The church exists as a society of those who have found life in Christ and who seek to enjoy it among themselves and to share it with others. It was never the purpose of Christ that His church should isolate

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itself from the world, still less that it conform to the world. His purpose was that it should convert the world. The church exists, therefore, not merely as a society but as a dynamic. It exists as the Kingdom of God on earth.

The Kingdom of God is made up of individuals who find their worth not because they occupy a place in a social structure but because they occupy a place in God's heart. This personal relationship to God is the measure of their worth and also the measure of their social task. For their task is none other than to bring others into the same relationship, that they too may realise their worth and live life to the fullness of its possibilities as these exist in God.

The work of the church is to adjust men to God that they may share God's life and do God's holy will. The kind of life it invites men to share is that made manifest in Jesus Christ, and the will it asks them to make their own is that will which was found in Him, the will that seeks to release men from the bondage of greed and fear and lust and to liberate their energies into fields of loving service.

This will does express itself in this world and is not merely a determination to save oneself in a world that lies beyond. It may not seek primarily to change the structure of society. But it does seek to change

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the spirit of men. With new life there will come new organisations. It is always life that organises.

It must seek to change the spirit of *any* society whose spirit is not the spirit of Christ. The evils of an acquisitive society are the evils of the *spirit* of acquisition and these evils are not in the system but in the hearts of the men who have made the system what it is and keep it what it is. The system under which men live is an expression of the spirit that animates their living. If men are acquisitive, they will forge an acquisitive system. If men are altruistic, they will forge an altruistic system. If men are Christian, they will make a Christian system. There is no social form which cannot be moulded or broken by the living, changing, creative spirit of man.

The Christian church exists to put the spirit of Christ into all social relationships. This spirit is stronger than the social moulds in which men would confine it. Like all living things it bursts the shell that would confine its life. If men are shy of the Sermon on the Mount, it is not because it is impracticable but because it is too challenging. The day may yet come when men may prefer communism to Christianity, in so far as communism does less violence to their love of material gain. To forsake all and follow Christ is a far harder task than to possess one's share and keep in step with one's

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neighbour. The demand to be a world-forsaker that one might possess God will always be too high – until we see Christ.

It is not that Christianity despises the world but rather it does not see in the possession of things any ultimate significance. It would have men realise their *own* worth and not the worth of their possessions. “What is a man profited if he gain the world and lose himself?” Or “What *thing* can a man gain that is of such intrinsic worth that for the gaining of it he should barter himself?” That life should find its significance in our pandering to the instinct of acquisitiveness seemed to Jesus a complete perversion and stultification of its possibilities. A man was infinitely greater than anything he could own. He was great not because of his social status but because of his status as a child of God, and his ultimate and permanent enrichment was the full elucidation of all his powers in the active service of God his Maker.

This does not involve a denial of the world. It is only in this world that we can express our powers. We express ourselves through the medium of things, but things are there to be used and not merely possessed. Most failures in life are failures in self-expression for which no amount of possessions can compensate. And our powers to be fully expressed

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can only be expressed in Jesus' way, for they are powers which are our endowment from God.

The idle rich and the idle middle class and, in many cases, the idle poor deny one of the fundamental rules of the life of Christ. "I am in the midst of you as one that serves." To deny men the means of self-expression is to deny them the fullness of Christian living, and that denial operates both in the case of rich and poor. The man who leaves a fortune to his children without leaving them also the spirit of obligation and service is cutting them off from life. He is making them anti-social and anti-Christian. To get and not to give is self-stultification and is a complete perversion of the spirit of the Master.

We shall have no stable social order, released from a constant preoccupation over material possessions, until we reach a clearer insight into spiritual realities and greater moral power to achieve them. As the significance of Jesus' life deepens in the hearts of men it will create a new standard of values. It is a truism to say that society is moulded by public opinion. The standard of values to-day, whether they are those of capitalism or communism, is frankly materialistic. It is in the possession and enjoyment of material goods that life finds its meaning. Christ repudiates them both. To Him it was in

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the possession and enjoyment of the spirit of God that life finds its meaning. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you." He did not repudiate the goods of this world, but He made them subordinate to a larger good, to the peace and strength and beauty and joy that come from the fellowship and service of the God whom He revealed.

The church exists to show that fellowship and service in action. When men deny their reality it is for the church as a living institution set in their midst, to meet their denial by *un fait accompli*. The great weakness of the church to-day is that it is so like the world. It does not consist of a body of men and women who are redeemed from the world, but in large part of men and women who, worried and overwrought by their obsession with material values, are trying to serve both God and mammon.

There is too little sacrificial service in the church, too little freedom in giving and spending in loving service for the good of men and the glory of God. Christ is a life-changer and if He is making no difference to us we have not found Him. Before the church can affect the social order it must be more faithful to Christ. It is Christ's way of living that its members must demonstrate if they are going to be of any effective use to those outside their

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fellowship. If the church is to challenge society through its members, it, itself, must face the challenge of Christ.

The great task of the church to-day is not with society but with itself. Before it can do anything *for* society it must be something *in* society. Those who are hearers of the Word must do it. Those who have projected their religion into the church must be brought to accept its burden and to know its joy. The church needs *reality* in its worship and its work, and the reality it must find is Jesus.

The church will not change society until it is found within it as the leaven in the lump. For our faithlessness and worldliness and lack of freedom and joy, we need the abandon, generosity and compassion of Christ our Master. Church members who are worldly in their own hearts need saving themselves before they can save others. The world cannot save the world.

The church can only save the world by living in it the redeeming life of love, and that life cannot be lived by an institution but only by the individual men and women who give character and purpose to the institution. That character and purpose must be out-going in compassion, friendliness, hopefulness *and strenuous Christian thought*. For Jesus not only out-loved the leaders and people of His day; He



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out-thought them too. So must the church do for the world. It is not so full of evil that it must be repudiated, but so full of promise that it must be redeemed. Christ died for men. Therefore, with all the courage and hopefulness of Christ, the church must set itself to its task of getting men to live for Him, with heart and mind, lest His dying be in vain. Surely there can be no greater apostasy than this, that Christ should die and that we should feel He might as well not have died, that nothing can be done in a stubborn world.

Christianity is not merely preaching a gospel but seeking to understand and remove the disabilities and hindrances that prevent men from living the good life. Most of these will be found in the human heart itself. It is manifestly true that men suffer from social injustice and from economic oppression and that these blind their eyes to the possibilities of the life of faith and love. But the aspiring life does not start when these inequalities are redressed; it starts when in the midst of them a man sees Christ and seeks to change his own life or change the lives of others.

Christianity does not need a new economic order as its basis. We do not need a redistribution of goods before we start to live as Christ lived. We, as we are and where we are, must seek to alter what

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stands in the way of such living, first *in our own lives* and then in the lives of others. Our social order does not *prevent* us living as Christians. It *challenges* us to live as Christians. The world may be stubborn, but we can always begin with ourselves. Perhaps why so many of us, ministers included, fail to achieve much for Christ is that we begin with our neighbour. The greatest blunder any man can make in Christian living is to seek to change his neighbour and to take himself for granted.

Break, break, my stubborn heart;  
And at His feet  
Pour all the golden trophies of thy pride:  
Nor stop to count the cost,  
Or think it meet  
He should a recompense for thee provide.  
He is enough: more than enough is He  
To fill the place of thy sufficiency.  
He is thy gain; Himself is thy reward,  
When, self forgot, thou ownest Him as Lord.

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**Y**ET THE CHALLENGE of Christ is not merely to purify or change our social relationships. It is primarily to adjust our lives to God.

However zealously the church seeks to win men for Christ and His service, and however it affects their attitude to one another and the satisfactions they seek, it will not perform its complete work unless it continuously deepens in their minds the attitude of awe and reverence for the God He came to reveal. Jesus pointed beyond Himself to the Father of our being. In Him we see the quality of the Spirit of the universe. He makes that quality of spirit available to our understanding by His life and death and resurrection. Through His love for us and through our love for Him, He opens up access to the Father. In Christ we see the Eternal One manifest in man's flesh.

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God is manifest in everything. The whole universe reveals the Creator; but if He is revealed in matter He is revealed also in spirit, and the reverence aroused in us by the sublimity of the heavens or the beauty of the world has its counterpart in the wonder with which we gaze on the spirit of Christ. We are created, sustained and energised by that quality of Spirit made manifest on the cross. In *Him* we live and move and have our being. God was His Father. God was like Him.

There is no doubt that some of the neglect of public worship to-day comes from the fact that men have in their minds antiquated conceptions of God, and they identify these conceptions with the teaching of the church. They have had in their childhood some rudimentary religious instruction. The God they were taught to believe in was a child's God, and they have never advanced in religion beyond the teachings of their childhood. God did this or God did that. God led the Israelites through the Red Sea. God performed some miracle or other. God would punish you if you did wrong. God made the flowers and the birds. God was in heaven where the angels were, and we would go and be with His angels some day if we were very, very good.

A man would think shame of himself if in other

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fields of knowledge he did not advance beyond the conceptions of his childhood. Yet some men in their religious apprehensions are still playing with their childish toys. What was given to them before they were in their teens is still being hugged through life like a Teddy bear. They are still in the religious nursery with infant pictures on its walls.

It is no wonder. They stopped learning about God before they left the Sunday-school and have never learned anything since. If they respect the church at all it is because they respect the associations of their childhood. We have all a sentimental partiality for old associations.

Yet surely one of life's vital tasks for every man as he enlarges his experience is to keep on re-thinking God. With the majority of us, God is taken for granted. We have given Him a name and we think we know Him. We talk of God as though everyone knew whom we meant without further explanation. We have always been familiar with Him, as it were. God made the world. God rules the world. God is the Father of Jesus Christ. God is our Father too, and we can pray to Him. God is the Father of everybody and wants everybody to pray to Him. God is invisible, of course, but some day we shall see Him. These are great Christian truths, maybe, but with many they are not

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dynamic truths. They are just trite commonplaces.

We live hurried, superficial lives for the most part, without poise and depth. Our minds are unresponsive – closed to the mystery and wisdom and beauty of the Being *in* whom and *by* whom and *for* whom we have our existence. Our hands are full, as we say. They are seldom emptied of our own concerns and stretched out in awe and adoration of the Being who sustains all being, who has given us life and health and all things.

We know all about God, and when we have given Him the glory that is His due by attending church on Sundays, we can turn again to our own concerns, happy in the thought that we have done our duty and that God will leave us alone for the rest of the week. If we are too busy on a particular Sunday to have time for Him, it does not matter very much. He will not mind if we miss a Sunday, provided we show Him that we are not neglecting Him altogether. Some people do neglect Him altogether, and they get along all right, but we are not very sure of their success or happiness in the long run. We do not deny God; but the average day runs quite smoothly without him. God never interferes.

Such might easily be the average man's attitude to God. I know of a certainty that there are many

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men and women who have a mystical sense of His presence and whose lives are surrendered to His holy will. There are those who cannot stay away from worship because they cannot live without worship. But it does seem to me that the majority of men and women could live without worship quite well if it became socially respectable to do so. That seems to be taking place before our very eyes.

Many of us are somnambulists and have never awakened to the wonder and glory of the living God. We need our consciousness of God to-day amplified and deepened by a closer acquaintance with the writings of men who were vitally aware of Him. We are not all seers and mystics, but we can read what the seers and mystics have to say. The Old Testament prophets and psalmists will help us there. They thought of God as sublime and imponderable. Take the words of Isaiah: "Lift up your eyes on high and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might." He thought of God as one who had "measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure" (Isa. xl). Yet when he counselled his countrymen to lift up their eyes on high and behold who had created the heavenly

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bodies, he thought of the earth as the centre of the universe and the sun and the moon and the stars as being of the size apparent to the eye. Astronomers tell us to-day that our nearest neighbour in the heavens, the moon, is 240,000 miles from us. The sun is distant some 93,000,000 miles, which is but a step compared to the distances of some of the remotest stars. Measured in light-years – and light travels six million million miles a year – our nearest star, Alpha Centauri, is four “light-years” away. There are spiral nebulae in the distant heavens which are ten million “light-years” away, a distance which is computed at sixty million million million miles. Where is the modern Isaiah?

God is the spiritual Being in which this universe has its origin and reality. The more we ponder over its vastness and mystery, the more imponderable does God become. “All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity” (Isa. xl. 17). As we stand before this august revelation of the Almighty in the starry heavens above us and in the pulsating life of the nations who, as far as mere numbers are concerned, are as nothing before him, our heads are bowed. We are at one with the prophet in wonder and in awe.

And if we are awed by the infinitely vast and



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multitudinous, we may well be equally awed by the infinitely small and complex. A drop of water, if it could be divided and sub-divided till it could be divided no longer would be found to be composed of entities named molecules. These molecules could be further sub-divided into atoms. The atom is constantly giving off electrons, which, we are told, are disembodied particles of negative electricity, and these are about a thousand times smaller than the atom. So a drop of water, seeming so simple, is a complex universe in itself. When we come to study the smallest substance we find it just as awe-inspiring as the planets in the sky. From telescope to microscope we move from wonder to wonder, from infinity to infinity, from God to God.

It is ignorance that leaves men irreverent. Knowledge brings us into the presence of the divine. Once we begin to think of the majesty of God we bow our heads in awe. Whether we think of the infinitude of space or whether we think of the packed power of the atom, God is revealed as awe-inspiring in His greatness, His wisdom and His might.

We need to be taught by the classical seers and prophets to see the God behind the phenomena. It is just mere cleverness to be constantly concerned with *external* reality. We may call it science and almost worship our knowledge, but it begins and

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ends with ourselves. We need the stimulation of the seer to become aware of God, to turn from the phenomena to the Creator and let our minds be filled with awe and wonder at the wisdom and power behind it all. I do think it is true to say that, even with many church-goers, and certainly with most non-churchgoers, the content of the term "God" is so thin that they are not overwhelmingly impelled to worship Him, and rarely in their worship are they moved to awe and adoration. They have accepted what they have been told about God but never thought themselves into the reality of God. They may worship to the best of their ability, but their ability to worship is severely limited by their want of thought and meditation.

We need to face up to our idea of God and ask if it will do to cover life as we know it. We need to think and think and think until it is so enlarged and deepened and heightened and glorified that we are lost in wonder, love and praise. This thinking about God is not an occupation for a spare ten minutes in order that some inadequate conceptions of Him might be rectified. It is, or should be, the master object of our lives. To open our minds to the reality of God should be our supreme concern if we are to find meaning in existence and reality in our worship.

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We should refuse to take God for granted and force ourselves out of static ways of thinking about Him. To those who find difficulty in widening and deepening their apprehension of Him I would say, Stop thinking of Him as God. You have probably thought about Him under that name long enough, and the word has become petrified. Think of Him as the Life of the universe, as the Being in whom you have your Being, as the Purpose in whom your purposes find their meaning or their lack of it, as the Reality that gives you reality. Meditate on the beauty of the world and on the Life that is expressing itself through all forms of beauty; think how this Life is seeking to express itself through you. Think of your own being and the mystery of life and of the eternal Being as the source and fountain of all life. You *are* because you are in Him.

Think of how this Life of the universe in which we partake was made manifest to us in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Think of the exceeding depth and love and beauty of that life, how God is revealed there and how God's Life sustains all things. Think of the great disparity between that life and yours, His exceeding great surrender to the will of God, your lack of surrender. Think of the quality of His life as He laid Himself day by day, and finally on the cross, on the altar of complete self-sacrifice to the will of

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God. Think of your own self-centredness, how you have not sunk your life in the universal Life and allowed yourself to be used as an instrument for its expression in the world. Think of how, if God is like Jesus, you don't know Him, for you have never offered Him the full accommodation of your heart and allowed Him to possess you and use you and bless you and give you joy. Think, meditate, surrender, pray that you might know God and, when you come to worship, be able to worship Him in spirit and in reality.

If we think of God as the supreme Being of whose wisdom and power all the phenomena of the universe are a revelation, and if the mind is prostrated before Him in wonder and adoration, what should our adoration be when we find Him revealed in Christ? It is overpowering to think of God as Creator. It is blessedness and peace to trust Him as Father. It is to this blessedness that Christ brings us. It is there He found Himself, even on the cross; and it is there He would have us be.

But what relation has worship to this Father God? Does He want our worship? Is worship not the requirement of a different kind of God, an Eastern potentate God; not the demand of a loving heavenly Father?

We think of this great God who formed the

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universe, the Being in whom we have our being, the Father of all men as revealed in Jesus Christ, and we feel somehow that He is too august and wise and, if we might use the term, too "sensible" to want people to gather before Him every week to sing praise to Him and to confess their sins to Him and to beseech Him for forgiveness and absolution. Do not all these activities rather imply the notion of a somewhat tyrannical God who is concerned about getting His due?

Against this conception, or misconception, of God the whole Bible rises up in passionate protest. It protests entirely against the kind of God who is concerned about getting His due. What was the message of Isaiah? "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed

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feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well: seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isa. i. 10-17). Thus Isaiah spoke in the eighth century B.C. If we may paraphrase his language simply, it is just this, "God does not want your worship. He wants *you*."

Three hundred years later we find another prophet saying the same thing. "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" (Isa. lviii. 5-7). If the teaching of the prophets of Israel means anything, it surely

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means that God does not want our religious observances; He wants us.

There is surely no need to give chapter and verse from the New Testament enforcing the same deep truth. Read any incident where Jesus clashes with the Pharisees, try to penetrate into the meaning of His invincible love for men, ponder over the significance of His death upon the cross, and you cannot fail to see in the whole gospel story *God calling men*. It is not men's worship that God wants but just men themselves. It was not for nothing that Jesus called God Father, and it is not without significance that the early Christian church rose to the heights of its appeal and power when it broke from the temple and lived its life of fellowship and devotion in the homes of its faithful people. "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain," said the woman of Samaria to Jesus, "and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John iv. 20-1, 23-4). Such is the charter of

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emancipation of the worshippers of God. God is not seeking the formal adulation of sycophantic worshippers gathered together in a building specially to do Him honour. God is seeking us. That is the heart of all we call worship. God wants us and He will accept us when we come and give ourselves to Him. The alternative to that is chaos and black night.

I know of nothing darker in the interpretation of life than the thought that God does *not* want us or refuses to accept us when we offer ourselves to Him.

That is the first thing we need to realise in our worship. God does not want our worship. He wants us and the whole of us. If our worship is not a self-offering to God it is a delusion and a snare.

Nor does God want us to the exclusion of other people. He wants all of us. He wants our neighbours as well as ourselves, and He wants us as much as He wants our neighbours. He wants us wholly, and He wants us all. Therefore we come to public worship to join with our neighbours in giving ourselves to God. For we can give ourselves more fully to God as worshippers than we can give ourselves as private individuals. God does not want certain private aspects of our lives as though there was a certain part of our life reserved for Him and a certain part reserved for the community. He wants all our lives



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in all their richness and their fullness, and that can only be given when we give ourselves in common.

Public worship is richer than private devotion. It is a fuller offering to God. We are able more fully to fulfil His will when we surrender ourselves in the surrender of our neighbours. Our surrender helps out their surrender, and their surrender helps out ours. For they embody some part of our life, and we embody some part of theirs. We are all related organically as members of society, and it is as members of this organism that we come to worship God.

Also as members of society we come as the priests of society to God. There are many people who do not worship, and there are many others who have grown entirely careless of God and His claims upon them. We are organically related to them also, as members of the human brotherhood, and we come as representatives of our common humanity touching God at the point of our worship. There is surely nothing greater we can do for our fellow men than maintain this contact with God. "Ye are the body of Christ," said Paul. The worshipping and serving church is the way in which Christ's spirit maintains itself in humanity. Through Him we have access to the Father, not for ourselves only, but for all men.

It is as a body of surrendered men and women

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that the church offers to God its praise and confesses its sinfulness and seeks for His strength. Our praise is not the praise of isolated individuals. Our praise is the praise of humanity. Our confession is not the confession of our own particular sins. Our confession is the confession of humanity, ourselves and others. The strength we seek is not strength for ourselves but strength for God's Kingdom. Worship is social through and through. It is our duty to our neighbours to worship and it is our duty to worship with our neighbours. He who cuts himself off from public worship is betraying his neighbour at his deepest depth of need. For humanity needs God. It needs to be reconciled to Him, to embody His spirit and to fulfil His purposes. This is not mere theory. Religion is not theory. It is *life*. There is no greater need in the life of the world to-day than that men should be reconciled to God and embody His spirit and fulfil His purposes as revealed in Christ our Lord.

Yes, it may be said, humanity may need God, but it does not want God. It believes it can get along quite well without Him. Morality can be divorced from worship. Think of Russia and other parts of the continent of Europe where denial of the reality of God is a set philosophy of life. Think of Great Britain and the widespread apostasy among large masses of the population. Why should I come to God

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as the representative of a humanity which would denounce and deny my ambassadorship? How shall I worship God in the name of humanity unless I have been commissioned to do so? The answer to that is that you also are a representative of humanity, and you can be a point at which humanity does express its need for God. The circumstances which have caused the eclipse of faith in some countries and in many lives in this country will pass away, and men will yet return to a worshipping, praying and believing church. For their sakes as well as ours the church must remain. Humanity needs its priesthood of worshipping people. They are the light of the world, the salt of the earth and, through Christ, the never-dying way of access to the Father.

I do not believe that that way, opened up by Jesus, will ever be closed, but it is our task and privilege and joy to keep it as wide open as we can. That men and women should find in God ultimate "worth," and the kind of "worth" revealed in Jesus; that they should acknowledge that "worth" in their "worth-ship"; that they should find the significance of their own lives in that "worth-ship"; that they should glory in the nature of God's Being and their own as found in Him; that they should confess their shortcomings; that they should listen gladly and with appropriation to the proclamation of God's

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nature and His love for them; that these things should fade from out men's lives is unthinkable. That indeed would be a day of darkness and despair. Our public worship redeems us from such darkness, and I believe that it is God's will, revealed in Jesus, that we should be so redeemed. God wants us. That surely is the heart of the gospel. If God does not want us we are lost.

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**I**N PUBLIC WORSHIP we give ourselves to God. We come to Him, not as private individuals, but as members and representatives of society. We ascribe to Him "worth" and seek to enter into His "worth." For the accomplishment of this there are many different forms of service. There is the Roman Catholic form, the Anglican form, the Presbyterian form and others. These forms differ greatly, and disputes about forms of worship have been among the most fruitful sources of division among Christian men.

These disputes about forms of worship have been held by some just to be the crowning proof of the sheer unreasonableness and foolishness of the religious mind. "These men all worship the one God," the sceptic says. "Why can't they all worship Him in the one way without all these divisions among them?" But if the worship of Almighty God is the most important matter to which man can give his

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mind, it is only to be expected that there should be differences of opinion as to how it should be best accomplished.

Men differ strenuously and decisively as to the best way in which to worship God because they take this worship so seriously. Of course, if it is not a serious matter, if it is a mere inconsequent addendum to life, by all means let us patch up some agreement and get on with life's real business, whatever life's real business may be presumed to be. But if the worship of God is man's supreme concern, do not let us think that the best form of accomplishing it is easily discovered. Let us rather seek to learn from one another and, as we learn, endeavour to build up our own worship in strength and beauty. And whether we seek to learn from other forms of worship, or whether we are content with the form we have, let us remember the intention of all forms of worship. Our worship, whatever form we use, is the ascribing of "worth" to God. It is our acknowledgment of our dependence on Him, the expression of our sorrow that we have not fulfilled His holy will; our request for forgiveness and strength; our endeavour here and now to live in His presence, to hear His voice, to be possessed, energised and sent forth by Him to fulfil the work and passion of Christ our Lord.

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People do not realise even what a steadying influence such worship has upon their lives. The nervous strain of modern life can only be relieved by such an acknowledgment of a wise and loving God, not casually admitted to the mind, but openly and explicitly made. There is nothing the modern man needs more for his peace and strengthening than just to return to public worship.

The deeper our apprehension of God, the richer is our worship of Him. Real worship implies that we have contemplated existence and that our minds have opened out to the reality of the Eternal Being who is the source of all life. We have meditated on the significance of things and we believe in God. We have seen God revealed not only in nature but in Christ and, in some degree, in all things beautiful, including the beauty in the lives of others. Now we would give reality to that belief by ascribing to God all "worth," and we would seek to rest our souls by finding our "worth" in Him. We would enter into the drama of public worship in which God speaks to us and in which we speak to Him.

It may be helpful to outline the action of the service. I take the Presbyterian form, because it is naturally best known to me as a minister of the Church of Scotland, though all forms have much the same movement.

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It opens with the singing of a psalm in which God's greatness is set forth. Here our minds are raised to the contemplation of His being. We are made aware of Him, of His creatorship, His overshadowing presence, His faithfulness and mercy.

O Lord, Thou art my God and King;  
Thee will I magnify and praise:  
I will Thee bless and gladly sing  
Unto Thy holy name always.

What Scottish congregation, at any rate, does not sing the one hundred and forty-fifth psalm to the tune "Duke Street" without feeling that it is being raised to a dignified and worthy conception of God? As the flowing melody pours forth, one is lifted above pettiness and worldly care to a real awareness of the majesty and strength of the Author of one's being. For my own part, if others do not need that awareness for facing up to the demands of everyday life, I do. Nor do I see that others who try to do without it get on too well without it. Any sane psychologist will tell us that what most people are needing is the stability of religious faith. The service of the church is there to minister to our need.

In many churches, after the opening psalm, there is a call to prayer, opening up access to God. It is invariably some words of scripture declaring His



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goodness or accessibility, encouraging us to come into His presence.

O come let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.

The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth. He also will hear their cry and will save them.

That is our warrant for worship and our ground of confidence that it will be received.

The prayer which follows may be a prayer of thanksgiving for God's goodness or adoration of His being. It always contains a general confession of sin and supplication for pardon and strength, and let us remember, when we pray, that He who hears forgives. We have entered into God's presence. We adore Him, confess to Him, seek and appropriate His pardoning grace.

Now, in the presence of God, we listen to the proclamation of His holy will. A passage from the Old Testament is read. It may not directly proclaim the character and purposes of God, though it is better that it should do so, but it is part of an organic revelation in which the character and purposes of God are made known to men. As we read, God is speaking to us. Thoughts of His holiness, His mercy

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and His goodness possess our minds. He is revealing Himself to us as of a certain character, and we enter more deeply into the richness of worship, worshipping Him now not only as infinite Being, but as Holy Will.

“Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord” (Jer. ix. 23-4).

“He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah vi. 8).

“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider” (Isa. i. 2-3).

Who can hear passages such as these read, and pay any attention to them at all – not to speak of hearing them with both ears – and not be arrested by the voice of God pleading with men for righteousness,

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justice and humility? It is good to hear these words. We *must* hear them if we are to be braced up in integrity of character and live for the strong eternal things that are grounded in the nature of God.

We make our response to the proclamation of God's will in a psalm or hymn of praise or consecration or adoration. Then the New Testament scripture is read, when we ascend to the full understanding and adoration of God as He is revealed to us in all His glory in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John i. 1, 14).

Such is the theme of the New Testament. From beginning to end it is all about the revealed glory of God in Jesus Christ; how He came unto His own and His own received Him not; how some received Him; how they entered into the life of the ages; how they proclaimed Him; how they suffered for His sake; how they wrote about Him; how they worshipped Him; how they passed the message on.

The New Testament is bathed in the effulgence of Christ. It is the holy of holies, the shrine of Christ's Presence. It was written by many hands and is

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gathered together from writings, some of them casual enough, originally scattered all over Asia Minor and Europe, but what a clear undistorted picture we receive of Christ the Holy One! His personality stamps itself on every page and makes these various writings into a coherent whole, because He so influenced the writers as to make them His own creation.

It is wonderful to think He can still do that with you and me.

So far our worship has been on an ascending plane of apprehension and adoration of God. We are now in His presence as revealed in Christ, and in that inner presence, adoring the God of Love, we make our petitions for humanity.

The prayer of intercession which is now offered is one we make as representatives of humanity bringing the needs of the human race before the Father. We do not come as individuals asking favour for others, but as seekers with others for the redemption and beatification of the whole human race. Humanity prays through us and brings its petitions before the throne of grace. What passion and pleading there should be in the intercessory prayer when we pray for the need of all the world! What a privilege it is to be a priest of humanity! When we stay away from church we are denying men our

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priesthood. "If ye ask anything in My name," said Christ to His disciples, "I will do it." Does Christ promise in vain: or does He promise and forget His word?

Then there follows a hymn maintaining our souls in God's presence, and opening our eyes more fully to His glory or dwelling on some aspect of His power and love, as we prepare to hear His glory expounded, or His mercy offered or His love set forth by the preaching of the Word. This preaching takes the form of an exposition of scripture and is in itself an act of worship. It ascribes "worth" to God and brings home to our minds and hearts what His holiness requires from us. To preach is to expound the scriptures, to let them loose on us in personal application. To listen and to receive is to ascribe "worth" to God. Both preacher and hearer are worshipping God.

Vital preaching requires vital hearing. It is true that some of us preachers are poor ambassadors for Christ. We may have desired a great office and may not have been gifted for it. We may utter platitudes and sail over shallow seas of trivialities and utter our own poor, barren thoughts and almost keep Christ dumb. Yet it is a wonderful thing that there should be such an office and that a man should get up before his fellow men and *try* to say something about the

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will and purpose of the living God and say it in Christ's name. The very attempt is impressive and if it is made before anxious hearers whose ears are strained to catch the accents of the eternal voice the man himself, unless he is perverted, cannot muffle it entirely. And what an experience it is when a man speaks forth, wrapped in the aureole of the divine, and moved by the compassion and love of Christ, declares God's purpose for our redemption and His willingness to receive us as His sons!

God wants us to hear that message and, as long as God is God, preaching will never die away. God will *send* His preachers and perhaps the preacher in our own church, dry and uninteresting as we may think he is, is just the man we need and whom God is using. He is certainly the man we called to proclaim the message to us. What else did we call him for? To call him and then to neglect him is levity. I wonder if God is willing to be a conspirator in such levity.

Usually after a short prayer that God might bless the preaching of His Word the offering is taken. The offering which is now given is a symbol and manifestation of the deeper offering of ourselves. Let a man beware of offering God money and holding back himself. God wants *us* in worship and it is through surrendered lives and not through

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surrendered shillings that He works His redeeming work in the world.

I do think that the offering we make in church or the other moneys we contribute to the church's support have a much deeper consequence than the discharge of one's honourable responsibilities. It does seem to me that one's use of money is a test of character. I have known men whom, in the Scots phrase, we describe as "warm" who have been very cold in their support of the church. They have splashed money about on their families and on their own pleasures, but have felt a strange inhibition come over them when it came to giving anything to the church. And I have lived long enough to see the effects of this inhibition working out in their own lives and in their families. I have seen the serious results of the lack of discipline and self-sacrifice in their homes, and I have been constrained to think, as a matter of open-eyed experience, "God is not mocked."

After the offering a closing hymn of dedication or praise is sung, the benediction is pronounced and the service ends. We have worshipped God. We have come into His presence and ascribed to Him all "worth." We have confessed our sins and been granted pardon. We have heard the proclamation of His holy Word and received it into our hearts.

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We have offered ourselves to God and received His blessing.

If anyone were to ask me which of all the elements of this high drama I deemed the most important, I would answer without any hesitation, "The benediction." To hear the word of peace spoken to our souls, to know that we have been in God's presence and that He has granted to us His blessing, surpasses all the power of music to charm and heal the soul. It is not in what we do towards God but in what God does towards us that the reality of worship is to be found. What people are needing more than anything else to-day is just God's benediction. Let us endeavour to worship Him in such reality that we may hear it spoken to us.

This order of service we have outlined, if its various movements are to be entered into with a real apprehension, makes a very live demand upon the worshipper, a demand I am afraid which very few worshippers have prepared themselves to meet. We may not be as bad as the old farmer who, when a rather loud-voiced preacher announced his text and started on his sermon, got up in disgust and stamped out of church exclaiming, "There's naebody could sleep here," but few of us come to church prepared to give the whole service concentrated attention. Interest, rather than spiritual discipline,



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is what the average worshipper looks for in church.

Yet our interest in going to church will deepen tenfold if our first thought is not of interest but of discipline. We may find it too much to give a disciplined attention to the whole of the service. That will only come through time, and much depends on the quality of mind we have. It is asking a great deal to give an hour's sustained attention to such a spiritual act as worship, but it will deepen the reality of the service if we try to give some part of it our concentrated thought. We may try to enter into the hymns with real spiritual interest, or follow the minister with concentration in the prayers, especially if they are well set out,<sup>1</sup> or we may think of the significance of the offering and make it a real offering. Some sermons are real proclamations of truth; some are provocations to mind-wandering; but every sermon, unless the minister is an idiot, has a text which means something. Dig for the meaning, and if the minister has missed it, meditate on it yourself and let him talk on.

Even though the service is dull and it is quite obvious that the minister has mistaken his calling, do not think it is not worth while to go to church. There is a loyalty of witness which is good for

<sup>1</sup> Whether they are read or not read in Scotland is a matter for the minister to decide.

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oneself and good for other people. It is an amazing thought that Jesus was loyal to the synagogue and "as His custom was" went there every Sabbath day. That He, the very Word of God Himself, should go faithfully each Sabbath to hear village preachers expounding the law of Moses seems almost incredible. Yet He did so. Nor did He go merely out of habit or custom. He was not punctilious about either. He went because, even at its worst, there was no alternative to the church of His day, nothing so good, nothing so strengthening, nothing so inspiring. As we look around it is difficult to find the alternative that Jesus missed. Let us be loyal to the best we know. When all is said and done it has taken a great deal of work and sacrifice to put the church in our midst. Perhaps it was that sacrifice that Jesus saw, and in the faith and sacrifice of the past He saw the hope of the future. He was loyal to it all through.

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SO FAR we have been speaking of the order of service in church and the act of worship as performed by the worshipper. Some would say that this act of worship is all that matters and that the place in which it is performed is altogether external to it. We can worship God in a barn as well as in a cathedral.

Granted. Yet I do think that the building where we worship is not irrelevant to what is performed inside it. If I were worshipping in a barn, I would want it swept. I would not expect stained glass windows in it but I would want a clean table with a white linen cloth and, if it were a harvest thanksgiving service, I do not think some corn sheaves would be inappropriate. I would want the barn, when used for worship, to be in keeping with the act of worship. If the barn was the best place

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available I would make it as much in keeping as circumstances would permit. If, in company with others, I could build a better place for worship than a barn, I would do so.

This raises the whole question as to what kind of building is suitable for worship. Should it have stained glass windows in it; should it have a chancel; should it have a gallery; should it contain any symbols; should it have a cross?

These questions cannot be readily answered by the layman, who has his prejudices; nor is it right that the layman should be at the mercy of the liturgiologist, who has his prejudices also. They will only be solved, then re-solved, by a growing taste for the beautiful and a deepening apprehension of what helps or hinders, as this taste tries to express itself in the creation and adornment of church buildings. Yet we should recognise that some men have better taste than others or, from their experience of the needs of the human soul, are much more competent to judge what will lead the worshipper to an awareness of God. We should be thankful for the leadership of such men, and it is one of the happy features of the church to-day that there are not a few of them. It is better to risk their leadership than the leadership of the crowd. Yet I do think that one of the real signs of a spiritual revival to-day is the

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revival of beauty in worship all over the land. The intelligent interest that is being taken in this revival is a real move forward in the things of the spirit.

This revival is not a fad. It is a spiritual necessity.

In our cities, especially, where men are cut off from the glories of nature and live by a mistaken self-sufficiency, the church building where the worship of God is conducted should suggest His glory, His power and His love. We cannot take these feelings of awe and reverence for granted. They must be suggested and it is the highest function of art to suggest them. To what higher use can a man put his powers than leading his fellow men to thoughts of God?

We do need architects and artists of genius to-day to build churches significant of the beauty and the glory and the love of God. We cannot be too thankful for the recrudescence of beauty in church buildings to-day, but the whole process needs to be carried forward with greater daring and courage and originality. We are still afraid of colour in our churches, yet how wonderfully God has lavished it upon creation. Blues and reds and greens and deep purples make the world we live in a panorama of delight. There is nothing irreligious about colour. There is something desperately irreligious in so

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much of our drabness and gloom. As Romain Rolland finely says, "Joy is as holy as pain."

When we come into God's presence, let us lift up our hearts to the great Artist of creation who made all things beautiful in their season. We are still afraid of symbolism, being fearful of our own irreligion. We might misuse our symbols and find ourselves in a landslide that would land us all in idolatry!

Christ made lavish use of symbolism. His language is full of colourful figures of speech. What are His parables but truth expressed in a symbol? He was a supreme artist in words. Can we, in His name, excommunicate from His church His fellow artists in wood and stone? Is the minister who uses words as his medium superior to the painter who uses canvas as his medium? Jesus communicated to men through any medium they would understand. He spoke to them in parables and He spoke to them in the last supper. They were both sacraments. Is there no sacramental use of beauty?

The soul can be reached from the eye as well as from the ear. Nature has no language except beauty, yet she speaks to us of God.

I look forward to the time when every church through its beauty and its symbolism will cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy," to the Lord, when artists, not

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merely in stained glass, but in stone and wood and painting will give of the best of their gifts to make the whole building speak of God and of His glory and His love. We need to make our churches shrines where thoughts of God come thronging to our minds and impel us to worship and adoration.

Our churches should lead us to thoughts of God, His sublimity, His glory, His wisdom and His love. They should be places where the awe of the Almighty falls upon the soul. We have lost the sense of creaturehood and dependency. Even religious people in many instances are far too familiar with God. He is still thought of as just a big man, a bit bigger, a bit more powerful, a bit more enduring than themselves, but with not much more to do than to fetch and carry for them. But God, as Jesus said out of His own deep sense of wonder and of awe, is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and reality. He is He to whom Christ offered His life, saying, "Father, not My will but Thine be done."

He is He in whom we live and move and have our being, as Paul declared and, as Augustine added, He made us for Himself, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Him. What must be the majesty and power and sufficiency of a God in whom the hearts of all men can rest? So we are brought to

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think of God as the supreme, spiritual, internatural, and supernatural presence, whose Being fills all things, *in whom* all things exist, *by whom* all things exist. We go to church to worship Him, to sink ourselves in His all-encompassing reality and to render to Him our joyful adoration for what He is and for what we are in Him. If we do not think of Him as worthy of the offering of beauty, our conception of Him is inadequate.

I do believe also that in the Presbyterian church and in others which hold to the same form of worship, our services should be dramatised more than they are if they are to awaken the instinct to worship in the hearts of men and women. With many, life is a drab struggle for a living from which the worship of the church provides no adequate release. The ordinary service of the church does not move them sufficiently, and they are not lifted out of themselves and their preoccupations. Many need the added dramatic element of some special occasion to put content into worship and to give purpose to their attendance in the church. They will come to Communion or to its festivals at Easter or Christmas because they are more dramatic and colourful than its ordinary services. It does seem that the weekly service of worship is lacking in dramatic appeal to large sections of the population and even to large



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numbers of its own membership, and that it needs some special occasion to give it cogency and meaning.

We may regret that this should be so, but if it is so, we must not shirk its implications. We must endeavour, if the church is ever to be the church of the people, to meet the needs of the people. We must bring back not only beauty and colour, but ritual and symbol into the drama of worship. Worship must meet man on the level of his ability and his need. I do not say that symbol and ritual are good in themselves, but they are good for a purpose. There are many Christians, including the Society of Friends, who can worship God without them, but there are undoubtedly others who seem at the present time to be quite lost without them and those, too, who think themselves most "protestant." Worship to them to a large extent is conventional and meaningless, and until its meaning is dramatised and objectified, they fail to comprehend it or to enter into it.

Many do come to Communion because it is a dramatic presentation of the gospel which deeply moves them and stay away from church because they cannot grasp the sermon. For when we understand the gospel we do not understand it with our minds only. We understand it with heart and soul

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and mind. We understand it with our emotions as well as with our intellect. The form in which it is presented to us and through which we offer our devotions to God should appeal to all our responsiveness and offer a medium through which the whole man can worship.

The form of service should also offer means through which the whole congregation can concentrate on what it is doing and thereby become a unified worshipping congregation. It certainly may be argued that a Presbyterian congregation is so unified in the singing of the praise and in the reading of the scripture and in their acceptance of and identification with the common prayer, but it is very doubtful if those who are weak in the faith share in this unity in any liberating way. We need a more objective unity, not because it is any better than this subjective unity, but because it conduces thereto.

It seems to me that the first thing that will give us this objective unity is to make a rearrangement of the seating accommodation in our churches whereby the congregation is enabled to kneel at prayers. A congregation is not doing the same thing all the time. At one time it is praising God, at another it is hearing the Word, at still another it is praying. Surely there are appropriate attitudes for all these

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actions, and the attitude most appropriate to prayer is that of kneeling. If prayer involves adoration, confession, supplication and thanksgiving and intercession before the Most High God, surely it should be done upon our knees. Perhaps one reason why the Presbyterian form of worship, otherwise so strong in its apprehension of the Almighty, is losing its appeal, is that it does not give an adequate opportunity for that sense of the Almighty to find expression. To close one's eyes and lean on a book-board or to sit back with one's hands folded on one's lap is all that is open to many members of our congregations in the circumscribed space available to them. Our people should be afforded a better opportunity of adopting a more reverent and devotional attitude in prayer. Through such an attitude they will realise their unity with one another in this act of worship and the sovereignty of God to whom it is offered.

It is quite possible that we require also to do away with vested interests in particular pews. I know that this is a thorny subject and that there is something to be said on both sides. The fact that a person has a right to sit in a certain pew, having established that right by long usage or by the paying of a seat rent or both, seems to attach certain people to a church and give them a place in it. People like to

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know where they are going to sit when they come to church. They find also that a certain place in the church suits them, they get to know their fellow worshippers around them and they feel at home. The renting of so much pew space each year or half-year is also a means of ensuring that the money will be found for maintaining the church's worship. In many cases the habit is so ingrained of claiming a certain pew that people will not come to church unless they have such a pew to sit in. They are mortally afraid of sitting in some other person's seat and so being regarded as intruders and, truth to tell, there are some members of the Christian church so lacking in Christian charity that they regard them as intruders, especially if they belong to a lower social stratum than themselves.

The rented pew has these advantages and disadvantages, but it seems to me that the crowning disadvantage is that it isolates people in worship. This isolation is not noticed when the church is well filled, but it is there. Worshippers come and go, making contact with those in their immediate vicinity, but insulated to a great extent from the worshipping community. This insulation largely prevents the church from being a fellowship. People can go to church for years and make no new contacts, no fresh surprises in friendship or discoveries

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of human need. On the social side their worship is stereotyped and the dramatic element is lost. The worshippers do not enter into a rich and variegated social experience which every Sunday has something new. They sit beside the same people every Sunday and make the same limited social contacts. They are left secure in their autonomy and fail to enter into an organic relation with worshipping humanity.

A great many prefer this autonomy and would be greatly shocked at seating themselves beside Tom, Dick and Harry in the house of God. They are the very people who need to sit beside Tom, Dick and Harry, and the sooner the church encourages them to do so the better. Probably one reason why the Communion service is still so widely observed in the Scottish church is not only because it is a dramatic presentation of Christ but also because Tom, Dick and Harry sit beside one another and the congregation enters into a richer social relationship than when they are all sitting in their own pews.

I strongly suspect also that that is the reason why so many attend the festivals of the church. They are, as it were, public occasions when everyone is welcome and there is no difficulty as to where one sits. All church services are public occasions where everyone is welcome, and there should never be any difficulty as to where one sits. Even though one

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“owns” a seat there is surely room in it for a brother in Christ or for the stranger seeking Christ. What are we Christians for?

In many churches the habit of sitting in a particular pew is so ingrained that we cannot look for any immediate improvement in this direction. There are, however, possibilities for advancement in the evening service. In many churches this service is poorly attended, even the elders deeming they have done their duty if they have worshipped God in the morning. The sparse congregation scattered throughout a large building makes anything like fellowship impossible and is rapidly becoming an absurdity. Every effort should be made at the evening service to encourage people to come together. The minister can give a strong lead in the matter if need be by ignoring the pulpit and conducting the service from the Communion table. I have often done so to much advantage. This change of location can make a great difference to the *ethos* of a service. It becomes more intimate and devotional and, as the minister comes nearer to the people, the tendency is for them to gather round. It may seem an admission of defeat. Instead of having two full services a day we are only having one service and a devotional meeting. In actual practice, however, it will be found that this more

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intimate and devotional service just provides the antidote to that defeatist mood which sometimes comes over both minister and people alike when they are gathered together like crows upon the tree tops in a comparatively empty building. Surely it is not essential in a church that everything should always be done in the same way. What is essential is that God be worshipped, and to achieve a worshipping community is the *first* essential.

Surely the congregation should endeavour to come together and achieve communion with one another as well as communion with God. Kneeling at prayers is a practical method of achieving the one, and giving up their isolation a means of achieving the other. I do not say that these practices in themselves will achieve the objects desired, but they are the means which should not be neglected.

It will be a long time, probably, in the church of Scotland and Nonconformist churches of England before symbolism comes into its own, for we are not at all clear in our own minds as to what symbols best express our faith; but at least an attempt might be made to speak to the soul through the symbol of the cross. Whatever other means we may yet adopt to give objective reality to the moods and movements of worship, this symbol should surely have a central place.

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We have no objection to building a church in the form of a cross or to having a cross placed outside the church. Communion tables and pulpits have discreet, unnoticed crosses. What about a cross which means something? It would be a great help to worship to have the cross present before our eyes as we seek to enter into the mystery and the wonder of our Christian faith. Surely the time will come when such a symbol will have a central place in every church, speaking to us of the love of God made manifest in the Redeemer. It is time we were beginning to realise that ritual is not foreign to our natures. The dressing-up that goes on in pseudo-religious movements, and the love of uniform made manifest in such associations as Boy Scouts, Boys' Brigades, Girl Guides and kindred organisations should make the church think. Our present static conception of what is fitting and helpful in worship may yet give way before the needs of human nature, and I believe that the need for drama, colour and movement is not eradicated but only dormant in the Presbyterian soul. But we must know what our faith *is* and teach it to our people. Then we can express it through symbols appropriate to its meaning. Christ must have known and entered into a great deal of church symbolism in the worship of the synagogue and temple, and He never said a word against it.



## THE ENVIRONMENT OF WORSHIP

It does seem to be the case that more people than we care to admit need to be helped to worship. They need the dramatic movement of worship made explicit in its form. We all know the danger of dramatising worship. Ritual and ceremony may take the place of the movement of the soul. But worship is a drama, and the question is whether the movement of that drama should be implicit or explicit in its form. I believe that the need of the time is that it should be made explicit. But whether it is implicit or explicit it must have spiritual content for him who is taking part in it.

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WE MAY seek to deepen the reality of public worship by improving the form through which the worship is made, but improvement in the form of public worship may only lead us into the great error of substituting form for content unless in the heart of the worshipper there is a deepening apprehension of God and what is due to His glory.

Some heightening of the dramatic element in worship may move the worshipper to surrender and adoration, yet the danger is that the form be accepted in itself as something to be gone through, the proper performance of which has merit in itself. I think this is the danger which most members of non-ritualistic churches apprehend. Form must not be substituted for spirit. Worship must never be allowed to become formal, but must always be the free exercise of the spiritual faculties of man.

Of course, in Presbyterian and Nonconformist

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worship we do have a form of service, for worship can never be quite formless. The drama of worship is implicit in the form and it is the intention of the worshipper's soul that gives it reality.

It is a moot question whether this drama is fully understood or understood at all by the average worshipper to-day. When the Presbyterian form of worship was first introduced, the Protestant congregation had in their minds the movement and the meaning of the Catholic ritual. They expressed the intention of that ritual in another way, but they knew that worship was a great drama where the soul was related to God and communed with God. They believed that their reformed worship gave them freer and fuller access to the Father. It fulfilled the intention of the Catholic ritual in a better way, yet they knew what the Catholic ritual was and this knowledge put meaning and purpose into the various movements of the reformed form of worship.

This reformed form of worship was the expression of a new conception of the worshipper's relationship to God. His worship was the expression of his own direct and immediate and personal relationship to the Father. It was the outcome of a religious awakening in the soul of the worshipper which had to express itself through a new form of worship. This new mode did what the old ritual did with

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this great difference, that the worshipper did for himself what was hitherto done for him by the priest. He himself adored God, held communion with God, received the forgiveness of God, appropriated the word of God, and received the blessing from God. He had a new status in God's sight, the status of a son to the Father, and the personal privilege and responsibility of this new relationship expressed itself in the manner in which he associated himself with his fellows in the public worship of God.

This sense of a personal relationship to God made the content of reformed worship depend more and more on the worshipper's own faith. Worship was not something done *for* him in the merits of which he shared; it was something done *by* him and only he himself could make it valid.

He had a serious, personal responsibility for achieving a right relationship with God and offering Him the worship of a surrendered and devoted heart. If this personal devotion was not present, the form of worship mattered little. It was an empty shell without content. The external must be filled up by the internal and that filling-up must be done by the worshipper himself. Therefore worship was not a rite performed in God's house, something in which one shared and came away. It was the outcome of

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the intention of one's own soul, the public expression of one's personal apprehension of God, an apprehension which was deepened and enriched by day-to-day piety and the spiritual exercises of one's own home.

This conception of worship still stands at the heart of all true Protestantism. Public worship is not something done for us in the merits of which we share, but something done by ourselves, and only our own earnestness and devotion can fill out its meaning. There is no salvation in the priest and no saving grace in ritual. We ourselves must bring content into worship and we ourselves immediately appropriate the blessing of the Almighty. If this is so, the personal responsibility to worship in spirit and in reality is very great. The worshipping people make the worshipping church. The quality of the worship we offer depends on the kind of men and women we are, and the blessing we receive depends on our own self-surrender to the will of Almighty God.

Many Protestant people accept these propositions but ignore the practical consequences of them. If the quality of our worship depends on the quality of our souls, it is incumbent upon us so to deepen our personal apprehension and experience of God that the worship which we offer Him may be

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spontaneous and real. We must come into God's house as men and women with a real personal experience of God which we desire to have deepened and enriched and blessed to us as members of God's worshipping people.

Public worship does enrich and bless to us our personal experience of God, yet that personal experience is primary if we would enter into its reality and be energised by its power. It is the heart which has already sought and found God in personal devotion which still seeks and finds Him more fully in the public offices of worship.

I do believe that in public worship we enter into a richer field of apprehension. We realise our oneness with humanity before the great Father of our spirits. We share in the common adoration, and confession, and supplication, and listen to the proclamation of His will for us all in the Christian commonwealth. Yet in our heart of hearts we must know God for ourselves, and have surrendered to Him by ourselves, and be supported by His grace in the difficulties and challenges of our own lives. How shall we worship One whom we have not personally known, and how shall we serve One to whom we have not personally surrendered?

Yet to many, to take part in public worship is often to make a general and not a particular

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confession of faith. The meaning and the content of worship have not been particularised in their own lives, nor fed from the stream of their own devotion. I believe that the church is failing to achieve spiritual depth and power to-day because its members' devotion to God is being externalised in public worship and not internalised in their own souls.

Ability to enter into worship depends on our own spiritual fitness and that does not depend on our attendance at church on Sunday, but on our own personal trafficking with God. If our lives are not surrendered to God, if there is no daily discipline of prayer, if there is no personal devotion to Jesus Christ and the claims of His Kingdom, public worship can become so external and unreal that it is almost a trouble to come. But when the heart is surrendered to God, and the will fortified by daily spiritual exercise and the mind illumined by the vision of Christ's Kingdom, public worship can be the crowning experience of the week, when along with God's people we enter into His presence, render to Him our adoration, listen to the proclamation of His holy will, re-dedicate ourselves to His service and receive His pardon, strength and blessing.

I believe that public worship is something greater than private devotion for those who are faithful in their private devotion, but it is no substitute for it.

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The two go together to make rich, harmonious, fruitful spiritual living.

A great many Protestants are really Roman Catholics in the respect that they have externalised their religion and projected it into the keeping of the minister of the church.

Dr. James Weatherhead, speaking in the General Assembly of the church of Scotland in May 1935, instanced an occasion when he spoke to an old man who was not so often in church as he might have been. He replied, "Well, Doctor, I have perfect confidence in you." It was said in all innocence, but it revealed an attitude to the minister common with many non-churchgoers. They have confidence in the minister and are satisfied with a nominal church connection. The minister is their priest. He has their religion in his safe-keeping. It has been handed over to him in its entirety, while they live life in their own way. If the non-attendance of the Protestant churches points to anything, it points to the fact that the sense of God has faded out of many of its so-called members' lives.

When people stop praying, they stop worshipping. Many carry on attending church for years after they have given up the practice of private devotion, but sooner or later their apostasy finds them out. When a minister who is a good preacher goes and another



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who is not such a good preacher comes, the thinning down of church attendance reveals that religious observance did not depend on the quality of the members' souls, but on the quality of the man in the pulpit. When a man gets on in life and is able to buy a car, it is often amazing to find how shallow was his apprehension of the claims of Almighty God. A minister may have preached at him for years but he never heard. The hearing ear depends so much on the surrendered and understanding heart.

The touchiness of church people, their lack of willingness to give and serve, all point to the same thing – lack of personal devotion. I would not like it to be thought that I have a poor opinion of church people: I believe that they are the salt of the earth, but I believe that it is here that the shoe pinches. There are many, many members of the church, office-bearers among them, who attend church regularly and who believe that they are worshipping and serving God to the best of their ability, but who in their heart of hearts have never personally surrendered to the claims of God as revealed in Christ, or submitted themselves to the discipline of daily prayer or meditation. They take themselves for granted and the church takes them for granted.

There is almost a conspiracy of silence in the church on the need for personal spiritual discipline.

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Public worship is not sufficient for the maintenance of a full and satisfying spiritual life. We shall never know the joy of public worship until we enter through the gate of personal surrender and tread the climbing way of personal devotion.

Yet I think if the need of spiritual discipline is clamant in the church, the blame for the lack of it must be laid very largely at the church's own door. Members of the church have been left to fend for themselves in these matters, and it has been taken for granted that a devotional technique is easily found. All one needs to do is to pray.

I believe that thousands of sincere men and women, left to their own devices, have failed to find a satisfying devotional discipline. They have read their Bibles with an honest intention of getting good from such reading, but they have been quite unable to receive it all as the inspired Word of God as their forefathers did and, with doubts and hesitations in their minds as to the real value of the practice, they have sooner or later given it over. They have prayed with a sincere desire to achieve reality in prayer, but they have found that that reality did not come. Many keep on praying. Some just let it fade out of their lives. They do come to church because they find that if there is an intelligent and spiritually minded minister in the pulpit, he helps them in a

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way that they cannot help themselves. Ministers for the most part have been content to let things go at that. I believe that if a movement were to take place in the church to help people in methods of personal meditation and prayer, it would meet with a response that would surpass all expectation.

May one give voice to a disconcerting thought? May it be that such help is not freely available because we ministers ourselves for the most part do not feel able to give it? Have we become preachers, organisers, visitors and friends of the family rather than men of God? Do we show forth to our congregations the joy of a God-possessed life and the strength and beauty of a character daily blessed by His presence, or have we externalised our religion also, on the numbers in the pews and on the strength of our congregational activities? Do we not perhaps spend too much time on our sermons, with the thought in our minds that we are preparing to meet with man, and too little time on our devotions, with the thought in our minds that we are preparing to meet with God?

Let us know God and help others to know Him. That is what we are here for: that, and nothing else. Let us walk with God before we talk about Him. Let us refuse to take ourselves for granted and realise our deep, personal need of God's spirit before we

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can do His work. Let us find God for ourselves and help others to find Him. That is our task.

I believe that we can best help others by gathering those around us who are conscious of their need. Let us revive the prayer meeting in our church. We can call it what we will – a meeting for fellowship and devotion, or a meeting for worship and prayer – the name matters little. Let us, where two or three are gathered together seeking help in the spiritual life, tell of the help that we have found and the methods of devotion and meditation and prayer that we practise. Let us put them into practice with others that they may not only be told about these things, but be trained in their reality. And let us persevere in this good work in the face of all personal inadequacy and discouragement.

Let us be bold enough to let other things go, if need be, that into the lives of the members of our congregations there may come a deeper personal apprehension of God and a greater freedom and reality in the means of personal devotion. The public worship of our churches, whatever organisations we may have around them, will only be strengthened and deepened by one thing – that the members who engage in it are “alive unto God.”

## THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE of the individual depends on personal spiritual discipline. Church-going in itself will not keep a man "alive unto God." To worship God for one hour a week is a completely inadequate spiritual discipline, and the sooner we face that fact the better. The church has too long been content to accept attendance at public worship as a sufficient criterion of an active religious life. We are finding to-day that the criterion does not work.

Members who have had no religious life of their own and who have depended entirely on the public offices of worship to keep the sense of the Divine alive in their hearts, have found this limited discipline of insufficient power to combat the attractions of the secular world. More than any other reason which men give, that is the main reason why so many drop out of the living fellowship of the church.

Unless public worship means for the individual

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something deeper than a recognition of God, unless it is the outcome of his own disciplined daily devotion, it will sooner or later cease to have any effective influence on his life. The habit of church-going may persist with some. With a great many others, even the habit goes. We need not regret very much the passing of the habit as a habit. If habit were all that we could count on for the support of public worship, the outlook would be black indeed. For the support of the church's work and witness (and how the world needs them!) we need something more in people than dogged perseverance in a good habit. We need men and women "alive unto God," with their souls lit and fed with the flame of personal devotion. Let the habit of church-going live or die, this, as a habit, will not save the world. The world is not saved by good habits, but by the moral and spiritual convictions of living men and women.

How can we live to God ourselves and make our private prayers and devotions living and effective to us? There are many books on personal devotion, two of the simplest being *Self-training in Prayer* by A. H. McNeille and *The Dew of Stillness* by S. T. Fraser. To anyone who wishes to make a start in the life of personal religion, I can recommend these books most cordially. There are any number of books of daily prayers and scripture readings and

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subjects for meditation, among them being *A Chain of Prayer Across the Ages* by S. F. Fox, *Highways of the Spirit* (published by Student Christian Movement), *A Devotional Diary* by J. H. Oldham, and *A Diary of Private Prayer* by Professor John Baillie. I simply mention these in order to be practical; there are many others. I have not mentioned the classics, chief of which is the Bible itself, because I think, with all due apology to those I have mentioned, that we should find out the classics for ourselves. When we find out the richness and the depths of the spiritual life we will want to look for the classics, and I would rob no man of the joy of that search.

But it may be objected by someone: "Hold! Hold! If I am going to get in touch with God, I don't need this apparatus. Private prayer is a matter which lies between God and myself. I can say my prayers myself without anyone telling me how to do so." Can you, my friend? Well, see to it, without any apparatus. But *see to it!* Getting in touch with God is not a simple matter. Some of us need all the help that we can get.

We regard those men and women who have written aids to devotion as our friends. We are grateful for their help. They have aided many of us to go further than we might have gone ourselves. Some of us they have enabled even to *begin*. There

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are more than the disciples who utter the request: "Teach us how to pray." If anyone is self-sufficient in these things, let him see to it. Let him wave aside every book of devotion that was ever written, but let him *pray*.

Those who feel the need of help in their devotional life should not make light of the help to be afforded in written prayers. A prayer on a printed page is a dead form of words. Granted – *until we make it our own*. We can take the words and put life into them, not by reading them off a page, but by praying the prayer. Such prayers are not lazy prayers. They are just as lazy or intense as the soul that expresses itself through them. They are formal, it is true, but spirit clothes itself in form, and confession, petition, supplication and aspiration must express themselves through words.

Until we can make our own forms and choose our own words, let us not despise the forms and words of others. Some people have been so gifted that they can express our needs better than we can express them ourselves. After all, the deep needs of the human soul are universal to men. The less of egotism and the more of common humanity we have in our prayers, the richer our devotion. Against this very egotism or self-centredness in prayer, the use of the prayers of others is a constant safeguard.



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But let us not think that the use of aids to devotion is going to do us much good unless there is the deep intention of our souls that in every act of devotion we seek to commune with God. It is comparatively easy to purchase a book of devotion, read a chapter or so a day, kneel down and say or read a prayer, and then get up from one's knees eager to get on with the day's business or get into bed. But if that is all that is in it, even as a habit it will not persist very long. We must achieve reality.

That is the crucial question. How shall we achieve reality in prayer? Again let us not despise form, thinking that reality is altogether spiritual. We must pay attention to "non-essentials." We must be careful when and where and how we pray. If we pray at odd moments, as though prayer were a subsidiary activity that could be pushed in somewhere among the major activities that otherwise possess our days, we shall not achieve much reality in prayer. If we pray in any place available to us at the moment, we shall miss the rich associations of past devotion. If we pray in any attitude at all, we may sometimes forget what we are doing and in whose presence we are.

Undoubtedly, there is a capacity for prayer at odd moments which some Christian men and women have developed to their great enrichment. It is a

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real achievement in the practice of the presence of God. But this comes to those for whom regular prayer as a primary activity has been an adequate preparation for such spontaneous approach to God.

We must do our best to concentrate in prayer, and the concentration of time, place and posture is an invaluable help to the concentration of the mind. To pray at a certain time, in a certain place and in a certain manner, is a great help towards fixing it as a real act. We are under discipline, and it is this sense of being under discipline that is often the first thing that arouses in us the sense of the presence of God. We are not our own masters, with God waiting our convenience. God is the Master, and we wait on Him.

The time has come for prayer. Let us become aware of God. Silence – in God's presence. "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. Show me Thy ways, O Lord. Thy paths O teach Thou me. The Bible shall speak to me. This book of devotions shall help me to speak to Thee. Hear, Lord, for Thy servant speaketh.

"Not for myself only would I speak, though I have much to say to Thee which Thou must in Thy goodness hear and in Thy mercy forgive; but for others also would I speak. I would speak to Thee of those near and dear to me, of those unfriendly and of those whom I have failed. I would speak, too,

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of Thy church, yes, and of the world. I would speak to Thee of all things of which a man should speak to his Maker, of all human dependency on Thee."

So in time we traffic with eternity – in silence, in speech, in adoration and in humble trust, placing before God the things we are trying to do; reminding ourselves of the things He is trying to do, and praising Him for what He has done, and from the contemplation of His love in Christ renewing in ourselves courage and faith. Our speech may be halting and our receptiveness dull, but we are not heard for our much speaking, and no man who waits in the presence of God comes away unblessed.

We can no more stereotype the form of private devotion than we can stereotype the flight of a bird; yet some manner of private devotion we must have if our spiritual life is to be fed and nourished.

I have found it a help in training the young men and women in my Bible class, who need training in prayer as much as they need training in Old Testament history or in the Acts of the Apostles or even in the historical events in the life of our Lord, to provide for them a little book of prayer which we use in class. It gives them a corpus of prayer round which their own thoughts can rally and enables them to work out of childish prayers to prayers which express their own growing awareness of the complex

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needs of their lives. At the end I have noted for them some aspects of prayer to which we should attend in our private devotions. It may be of help to note them here. They are:

Recollection of God's Presence; Adoration of the Divine Being revealed in Christ; Thanksgiving; Confession; Petition; Intercession; Dedication.

Many, much more expert in prayer than I am, may not agree with that order, but some order we must have if our prayer is not to be discursive and perfunctory. It is a good thing to make up our own little order of prayer and to write out our own petitions. It is a help to devotional discipline, and devotion *is* a discipline. It must not simply depend upon the mood we are in. What is a mood in our trafficking with God?

Without such spiritual discipline the public worship of the church lacks that element of life and reality which only the individual himself can bring. Public worship is a filling out and enriching of individual religious experience. Without such experience, maintained and fructified by daily waiting on God, we may be moved in public worship by the singing of a hymn in which we join, we may feel helped by the prayers or we may be touched by the sermon; but we shall not enter into them, and be possessed, uplifted, cleansed and strengthened by

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them, unless our souls have been kept alive unto God by daily religious discipline.

The pressing upon the individual his responsibility for maintaining his own religious life is one of the most urgent tasks before the church to-day. If the strength of the church ultimately depends upon the religious convictions and experience of its members, the church must set that before it as its supreme work. Church people to-day are faced with many calls upon their energies. There is always "something to work for" in a church, whether it is the maintenance of the fabric or some scheme or schemes of the church in the outside world in dire need, or just the constant struggle to keep the church going and to make ends meet. There is ample scope for people's energy in a church, whether in the way of raising money and getting others to give money, or serving and getting others to serve. The constant needs of the church set its constant tasks, which appear to be so immediate and so demanding as to be good enough in themselves, and are engaged in by people who take themselves for granted.

But these tasks, however immediate and demanding, are not Christ's supreme work in the church. They may even be a subtle form of turning away from Christ's work with ourselves. He is striving with *us*, that we should be reconciled to God and that our

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spiritual life should be so enlivened and enriched that these tasks are a necessary and inevitable expression of it.

When we refuse to take ourselves for granted, we shall realise what the supreme task of the church is. It is the work of Christ. It is nothing less than the conversion of the individual and the deepening and enriching of the spiritual life of every member. That work comes before everything else, and the energy of the church must be directed into that channel till, flowing through the individual soul, it flows out in healing and blessing on the world. This energy comes from God alone, and the supreme task before the church is to bring the individual into the presence of God, the source of all illumination and power and joy.

We need in the church a constant insistence on spiritual renewal. It may be said that members who meet week by week in the public worship of the church are afforded such opportunity. Their personal religious discipline is enriched by the common worship of the sanctuary. Not for a moment do I doubt that, but we must not limit the enrichment of our spiritual life to that alone. Apart from personal religious discipline and regular worship, we must have *seasons* of renewal. It is a tremendous help to have a season set apart for God, when for a few days we can be released from the

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cares of the world and have leisure and opportunity to meditate on life and enter into the joy and power of spiritual things. Ministers can manage to break free if they want to and enter into a season of retreat. Amid the quietness and beauty of nature they can draw apart from the world to God as Jesus did, but laymen, tied down for the most part to a more rigorous weekly routine, have not this advantage. The church must endeavour to make its own retreats, adapted to the circumstances of its members, whereby opportunity is given to all to enjoy a season of spiritual refreshment and to enter more deeply than they are able to do in the brief hour of public worship into the reality and grace and joy of God.

One such season that already lies to our hand for such a purpose is the season of Holy Communion.<sup>1</sup> It is a great opportunity of deepening our apprehension of God. There is no one in Scotland who takes part in a Communion service but who feels its solemnity and its spiritual power; but I want to say this, and to say it as strongly as I can, Communion is not a *service* – it is a *season*. It is a particular season of spiritual refreshment and power, and if we let it go as a season we miss the finest opportunity the church provides of getting “far ben” with God.<sup>2</sup>

It begins, usually, with a Preparatory service on

<sup>1</sup> See note on p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> See note on p. 63.

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the Thursday evening, and ends with the Thanksgiving service on the Sunday night. Unless it is regarded and used as such a season, it fails to achieve its purpose of affording us such an opportunity of withdrawal from the world, and examination and meditation and culminating worship and communion and thanksgiving, as it was meant in the minds of the Reformers to give.

The practice of whittling down the Communion season to a service of Communion on the Sunday morning, with the Preparatory service projected into the previous Sunday evening service and the Thanksgiving service abolished in favour of some popular evening address, is much to be deplored. I, for one, would move entirely in the other direction. Magnify the Preparatory service: it is the beginning of the Communion season. Let the members of the church be made conscious that the season of Communion has now commenced, and that until it concludes with the Thanksgiving service on the Sunday evening they should endeavour to open their lives to God and to dwell in His presence. Most of them during the Friday and the Saturday have to engage in life's ordinary routine, and on the Sunday also household duties and other obligations must absorb the attention and energy of many; but let the Communion season, as a season, be deliberately recognised,



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and other things subordinated to the spiritual purpose of these few days, and it will be found that the spiritual life of the whole congregation is deepened and enriched.

I am not writing as an impractical dreamer who has no thought for the multifarious duties of everyday life. I write as a rather practical minister who knows that one of the great needs of everyday life is just such a season of quiet and spiritual refreshment as a proper Communion season gives. One of the great weaknesses in the life of church people to-day is that the Communion season has degenerated into attendance at a Communion service, a service devoid of its proper setting of quiet and meditation and preparatory prayer. In many cases it has degenerated into a mere recognition of an almost moribund church membership. Enlarge and deepen it as a *season*. That is the way to extend its adequacy and power. Give up nothing that belongs to God.

The Easter Passion Week is now in Scotland coming to be used for the purpose of deepening the spiritual life, and this is all to the good. In many churches it culminates in a Communion service on Easter Sunday morning. We may look to see this practice gaining ground. It is still looked at askance by some because it is supposed to savour of Anglicanism or Roman Catholicism. When we learn to

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observe our own Communion seasons, we shall learn that Passion Week is the most appropriate time for one of them. When we realise what they can do for us, we shall cease to fear Anglicanism or Romanism. We shall fear only the loss of the spirit of God, and perhaps in its recovery in our own lives we might see evidences of its working in our great sister churches. It is a remarkable fact that, despite all the controversy that has gathered round the celebration of Communion, in actual practice it is just at this point we feel drawn nearest to our brethren in all the churches.

It may be thought by many that in stressing this devotional discipline the church is asking far too much of its members. The contrary is true. Its members are asking far too little of the church. They are failing to draw on the reservoirs of grace. Who is sufficient for these things? we say. *Who is sufficient without these things?* That is much more to the point. Our sufficiency is in God. To have our ideals, our courage, our poise and calm, renewed and kept sufficient for the demands of life, *that* surely is the great need of us all to-day. It cannot be met without the practice of devotion.

We may live without God: we cannot live *well* without Him.

## THE DYNAMIC OF WORSHIP

WITHOUT GOD we can do nothing. Do we really believe this? Is it not a fact that people all around us get on quite well without God, and that the decline in church-going is simply due to the fact that they have discovered that God is not indispensable?

It seems to be so, yet I think that what people are discovering is just that certain conceptions of God are not indispensable.

What these conceptions of God are in the mind of the average non-worshipper is not easy to discover, but whatever they are I do not think they have much resemblance to the God of Jesus Christ. That conception of God I believe to be indispensable to any sane, healthy, well-directed life, and it is because people have lost touch with God so revealed, or have never found Him, that they struggle on without public worship. So long as men turn away

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from that revelation of God, so long will they turn away from the church. There is no alternative conception of God of sufficient worth as to constrain us to offer our worship and to move us to adoration.

It is the God revealed in Christ we worship, and that God is indispensable. He is indispensable for our peace, our progress in goodness and our joy in living.

When we recognise Him as supreme, the Creator and Conserver of everything that is, we are able to live through our days in tranquillity and with confidence and serenity. The Christian life opens up to us boundless horizons, and the inspiration of a pure, full life in God makes for courage and for power.

Are these things not just the very things that the modern man is needing? Most people, consciously or unconsciously, are oppressed by anxiety and fear. They fear their own inadequacy for life. Will they be able to face up to the requirements of the future? Will they be able to triumph over life's emergencies and provide for their own needs and the needs of others? In the heart of this fear there lurks the demon of scepticism, scepticism about the character of God and the real meaning of this mysterious life which they are living. What are the things in reality which have supreme and abiding

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worth? They don't know. All they know is that they are here and they have got to make the best of things. Making the best of things can be a nerve-racking business, leading to sheer exhaustion of mental and nervous energy. That is the position of many folk to-day, and because it inspires and stabilises and reassures us, worship succours us at the point of our deepest need.

The recognition that God as revealed in Jesus Christ is supreme wisdom and power and love is the solvent for the anxiety neurosis that curses so many lives to-day. As Professor James said a considerable time ago, "The sovereign cure for worry is religious faith. The turbulent billows of the fretful surface leave the deep parts of the ocean undisturbed, and to him who has a hold of vaster and more permanent realities, the hourly vicissitudes of his personal destiny seem relatively unimportant things." Yet more than recognition of God is needed. We need a full commitment to Him, and that is just what we do when we engage in public worship. We ascribe "worth" to God, such "worth" as is revealed in Jesus Christ, and in the conviction that God is of such ultimate "worth" we address ourselves to life's tasks in the surety that all we do is encompassed and guided by a wisdom and a love that surpasses our comprehension.

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God is adequate for every situation. For every situation exists in Him, and we also exist in Him. In worship we recognise the "wholeness" of things, as they exist in God, and turn to life's particular tasks and demands confident that they are governed by His love and care.

Worship takes loads of responsibility off our shoulders. We are called upon to do His will in our particular circumstances, which are *His* circumstances, and to leave the rest to Him. Jesus was constantly telling men not to be anxious or careful, but to live a day at a time. "The day's own trouble is quite enough for the day" (Matt. vi. 34, Moffatt's translation). It is a good God that governs life, and all things work together for good to them that love Him. It may be difficult to accept that and to live in the strength of it. It is far more difficult to deny it and to live without the strength of it. Public worship fortifies our faith and our confidence by deepening our awareness of God. It gives us power to live.

In waiting on God our minds are freed from their bondage to things of sense and time and liberated into an apprehension and adoration of the God that governs the things of sense and time. We need this liberation far more than we need our "breaks" and holidays. We require to be lifted out

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of the grip of circumstances into the presence of the God who governs the circumstances. It is that which saves us from futility and despair and gives us strength to do and dare to the uttermost.

Think of Jesus on the cross, when He by the certainty of His faith was lifted out of the grip of circumstances into the presence of the God who governed the circumstances. *That* was the secret of His triumph, and it can be ours, too. He died to make it ours. In worship we, too, triumph. No wonder praise is such an element in worship. Are not thousands needing just this one thing, to have the note of triumph restored to their lives?

We often hear people say, "If I only could get away from things for a bit." Every week we have the opportunity of getting away from things for a bit, when we come to worship God. Men and women are over-driven and harassed because they never come. When we come to worship we enter into an experience where our conscious apprehension of God, such a God as is revealed in Jesus Christ, dispels our worries and our fears. We find wholesomeness in life again, for God is the whole in which our lives have being, and resting in His presence we find our peace.

When we come to worship, also, we find validity for our moral strivings, our idealisms and our search

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for beauty and truth. All the things that make life worth while, and which are so often pushed beneath the surface of our minds by the pressing demands of daily living, have freedom to expand themselves and to issue into conscious recognition.

Life as it is seen in God takes on the aspect of beauty and wonder. He is the Source of all goodness and beauty and truth, the Conserver of all spiritual values. No matter how they elude us in the daily pressure of living, they now gleam before us like steady stars set in His eternal sky. They are not old, far-off, forgotten things, discarded long ago in life's dusty pilgrimage, but present in the very constitution of reality, to be rediscovered and repossessed and re-energised in us. The secret of all victorious living is inspiration. Worship sends us on from strength to strength.

For those who falter and fall – and which of us does not – public worship assures us of the mercy, forgiveness and grace of God. (It is so easy to write these words, or to read them casually. We ought to linger over them.) We join in the general confession of sin, acknowledging our need of forgiveness and renewal, and we receive it. Many people, haunted by a sense of failure and uncleanness, have their lives unnecessarily darkened because they do not really know what public worship is. I believe



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that our particular sins need to be confessed to God, and where wrong has been done to another, such restitution made as lies within our power; but confession is not a private matter. In sinning against ourselves or in sinning against our brother, we have sinned against society. We are less than we might have been, and society is so much the poorer by our sinfulness. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and in taking our place with our sinful brethren before the throne of grace we take our proper place.

The prayer of confession that is there offered is our prayer and their prayer, and the word of absolution that is spoken is spoken for us as well as for others. The service ends with the Benediction. Therefore, go in peace. Accept the gracious blessing of God. He has a right to offer it. It is not your worthiness to receive that matters: it is God's right to give. If He should give to you, accept what He gives in all thankfulness. It is His good pleasure. Try to be worthy of His renewed fellowship and to keep in His presence day by day.

And so from worship there comes the mental and moral power to do God's holy will. By the acceptance of His forgiveness, we are released from moral impotence. Our ideals are renewed and strengthened; we go back to the world again with fresh heart to

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take up its challenge. Life is no longer a daily struggle amid conflicting interests, but a moral and spiritual adventure in which we advance into new truths and fresh experiences. If this seems too good to be true, ask any old saint of God. We have ignored saintly men and women far too long in favour of the "good fellow" and the "go-getters" and the merely clever. I have lived long enough in the world to see clever people growing old, and the sight does not inspire me. Saintly men and women keep on *growing*. The "good fellow" and the "go-getters" are *passé* when they are forty; they have run through life's interests. A full life needs constant inspiration. The only adequate inspiration for a man's full life is the vision of God in Christ.

Week by week as we return to God we gain fresh insight into the meaning of reality and renew our allegiance to the things that are lovely and of good report. The pressure of life is relaxed, and the sense of the Infinite possesses our souls. We are freed from the trammels of our earthly existence, and our hearts adore the Divine.

From that adoration we must return to the particulars of our daily existence, to that rich variety of work and love and art and recreation and social service and idealism which makes life so

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interesting and so satisfying; but no longer are these particulars scattered and dissociated. They are held together by the reality of the wise and loving God in which they find their being. They are not worthless but find ultimate worth in Him.

In ascribing to Him all worth and glory, we assert the permanent meaning of our lives as we strive to live for worth-while things. All present and ultimate worth is conserved in God, and the faith and idealism and sacrifice and joy of men are not the least of things in His eternal kingdom. In the worship of the God of Jesus Christ, we enter into that great saying of Paul's in which he dared to say: "All things are yours, the world, life, death, things present, things to come. All are yours. And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. iii. 22). There are boundless moral and spiritual resources there. Why make no effort to possess our possessions?

"Fear not, little flock," says the Master, "for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

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**T**HE THINGS that men are needing most to-day are new spiritual horizons and fresh moral power. They will not be found in politics, or sport, or big business, or even in social service, but only in a return to God. Then from new life in God men must turn to their politics, sport, business and altruism to express their vision and to make real His kingdom.

In God's providence we are all living together in a world where momentous issues are being decided day by day, pregnant for good or ill. Each man ought to have his own reactions to them. What is a man for but to decide and act? The contribution a man must make to the social good must be his own contribution. It must not be the mere echo of some "leader's" slogan, another voice added to the bawling of the crowd. What society needs is just the

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best that we can give; and the best a man can give is *himself*, purified, sanctified and sacrificial from a close communion with the God of Jesus Christ.

As practical men, looking around us to find the means of our cleansing, we find the neglected church. Its doors have stood open a long time now, and they are still open. Let us pass inside and bow our heads and worship, that, accepted, pardoned and renewed, we may still give a man's life to further the purposes of a wise and loving God.

For those of us inside the church, the task of bringing men and women to the knowledge of the love of God and an active commitment to the work of Christ is urgent. It always has been urgent; but surely we are not wrong in believing it is the first of all tasks to-day; the peril in which we are placed by our selfishness and blindness is so great, and there is no other way out that the mind of man can see. Ministers, especially, who sometimes have little to hearten them, must address themselves to their calling with sacrificial dedication. Many do not want us, but it is not because they do not need us. Their *need* and Christ's *commission* is our only concern. We must pastor our sheep and deliberately go out to seek and to save the lost. It is here, in a minister's pastoral work, that his greatest opportunity comes

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to him to gain souls for the Kingdom, and if it is carried through in earnestness and yearning and prayerfulness he is discharging his commission, and to God must be left the rest.

This evangelisation of the church should consist in the deliberate seeking of lost individuals. The pastoral work of the ministry in many cases has fallen into quite useless banality. For a minister to go the round of the members of his congregational roll, making so many visits in an afternoon and often for weeks on end never touching reality, is just about the last word in futility. It may please people to be taken notice of, but Christ does not send forth His servants to please people. He sends them forth to save them.

I write this confession for what it is worth. Some years ago I made out a card index of the members of my congregation. I put the names of those who attended church regularly on a white card; the sick and aged and infirm on a blue card and the non-churchgoers on a pink card. In so far as I had time to do so amid the other claims of my ministry I concentrated on the non-churchgoers. I tried to get to know them, spent time in going back and forward to them, and sought to find out as a friend what hindered them from coming to church. Some of the main reasons for their non-churchgoing I have

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systematised in the opening chapters of this book, and I shall say no more about them. But what tales of human need and weakness were revealed in the stories of these non-churchgoing people. Some needed to be reconciled to one another; some to be reconciled to their circumstances; all needed to be reconciled to God. I think that the work of a pastor is a high and holy science, and it is needed in no quarters more than in the homes of those who appear outwardly to be totally unresponsive to it.

I write in all humility, but I do believe, from my own experience, ministers would do well to arm themselves for their pastoral visitation with a sound knowledge of psychology, and when they find men and women who have lost all active connection with the church, or members who only attend occasionally, they should seek to discover what has gone wrong. A minister is a doctor of the soul, and we go among the people as practitioners in the great art of soul-healing. A man may heal few souls from his pulpit, for not all ministers are preachers, but he will never lack the opportunity as he sits at the firesides of his people.

We need deliberately to go forth as ambassadors of Christ, seeking occasion to reconcile men's lives to God. Sometimes a man must be reconciled to himself, sometimes to his wife, sometimes reconciled

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to society, always through such a reconciliation reconciled to God. It is the lost we must seek, men discouraged, bewildered, self-satisfied, bitter, proud or envious. It is not the changed times that are keeping people away from the church, but their estranged hearts. The greatest need of most people is someone who understands the heart, who out of discouragement can bring courage, out of darkness, light, and out of failure, new endeavour. The pastoral work of the Christian ministry is the most important work to which any man can set his hand to-day.

One prays to God also for the time when elders of the Christian church will recognise the true significance and opportunity of their calling. The elders of the church of Scotland, as far as their work has come under my notice, tend too much to leave the pastoral care of the congregation to the minister. Many of them feel, no doubt, that the reclamation of human souls is quite beyond them and that they have no aptitude for helping their neighbours floundering in the deep waters of the spirit. It is the elders' business to cultivate such an aptitude. It does not need technical knowledge of theology. Many a man is saved by exceedingly bad theology! It does need a genuine concern for the spiritual welfare of those people whom God has placed under



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his charge. If Christ could tell a rough fisherman like Peter to feed His sheep and His lambs, we need not think that it needs a college-trained gentleman to do the job. Christ's work just needs Christ's spirit; no more and certainly no less.

We need not be afraid of bungling. If Christ's spirit is in our hearts, we will not bungle anything. An elder's pastoral responsibility does not stop when he has distributed the cards for the forthcoming Communion. It is only discharged when all his flock are gathered round him before the throne of God. Both ministers and elders are shepherds who will be required to give account of their stewardship. It is not enough that the shepherd should appear unscathed before the Master: He will enquire, "Where are the sheep?"

The church must make its impact on society by making its impact on the individuals just outside its fellowship. In every congregation there are merely nominal members; in every district there are lapsed members. These must be sought out and, whether through the trained psychological knowledge of the minister or through the concern and friendship of the elder, reconciled to themselves and to God. The work is arduous, sometimes for long seasons seemingly quite unpromising, but it is never unblest, we may be sure; nor do I believe it is finally

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ineffective. It is God who is using us as His instruments and He is never ultimately baffled. We may not see the response that we would like to see, and often we meet cases of selfishness and depravity whose reformation seems quite beyond our powers, but strength and energy come from the task which assure us that God is in the work.

We may not fully understand the mysterious depths of the soul in which men hide from Him. It is enough for us to understand that it is He who is seeking them and He is using us in His great work of redemption. When we have done our very best, and are baffled, we must commit the rest to Him. But the work is not always baffled. My own experience is that, when we seek with persistent love, we find; and then the sight of a soul returning to God sends joy into our hearts that is unearthly. It is the joy of heaven. No greater work can a man do than this. It is the very work of Christ.

“Ordinary” members of the church have their own personal responsibility in this great work of evangelisation. There are no “ordinary” members in the church. To be a Christian is to be a witness for Christ and to live by His power. It is not enough that members of the church should “keep their own door-step clean.” Christ died to make us much more than respectable. He died to make us

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passionate for the good of others. The Christian who withdraws from the world because it soils his garments has yet to learn the story of the Cross. The parable of the good Samaritan still challenges us. There are too many "good church people" who are still content to pass by on the other side. No doubt the Samaritan would be regarded by the priest and the Levite as an interfering busybody who would sooner or later get his fingers burnt. Perhaps he lost his twopence. Who knows? But he saved a man. That was Christ's business. It is our business. Why are we Christ's?

Certainly most regular church-goers keep their garments clean. They are nothing if not respectable. Jesus did not think very much of respectability. His hands were stained blood-red, and His garment very soiled, as He hung upon the cross. When we forget about our respectability and see His passion, we shall find the impulse to sacrificial service. Our neighbours need us because they need Him.

If the church is to fulfil its evangelistic mission, it must also win and hold its youth. The church is not holding its youth, because its religious agencies for the young are being defeated by the irreligion of the homes of its people. Religion is being projected out of the home into the church itself and is being connected with an institution rather than with life.

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Children who never see their father or mother praying in the home are not likely to be greatly impressed when they see them praying in the church. Prayer is associated with the church rather than with the home life.

Religion is externalised from the day-to-day life of the home, and the distinction between the sacred and the secular is early implanted in the young mind. It is connected with the church and not with conduct.

Religion is not connected with life. It is associated with certain observances. It is not the foundation on which the home is built. It is found in the church only, which is regarded as an institution to which the home is attached. When the child comes to the age when he must choose between the spirit of the home and the spirit of the church, he will choose that spirit which has moulded him for six days in the week rather than that which has influenced him one in seven. Our secular homes have produced the secular Sunday. The spirit of the six days in the week has captured the seventh.

The revival of Sunday observance will not come from de-secularising the first day in the week, but from spiritualising the six other days in the week. When religion is revived in the home it will revive in the church. We need at the present time more a

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revival of week-day religion than of Sunday religion. Sunday religion has faded out just because it was Sunday religion. God does not claim Sunday: He claims the whole week. When we whittle down His claim upon us by giving Him Sunday only, we will soon decline to give Him even that. When we grudge His supremacy over the secular things of life, we shall soon deny that there are any sacred. The alternative is to make all things sacred, and surely one of the most sacred things in life is the bringing-up of children.

I often think that, instead of parents sending their children to Sunday-school to learn of God, they themselves should come to a week-night school for some systematic instruction in the things of the Kingdom; then take upon themselves the responsibility of teaching their children in their own homes. For some years now I have conducted a week-night Fellowship of Devotion, with co-operation in the practice of the devotional life and systematic instruction in Christian truth as its primary objects. It has been well worth while. It is surely a tragedy that Sunday-school teachers should be fathers and mothers in God to our children.

All fathers and mothers want to do their best for their own, and that is why so many send them out to Sunday-school. They go there, alas, to learn what

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the fathers and mothers cannot or do not teach themselves. The church seems quite content to get the children into its Sunday-schools and to shut its eyes to the fact that any impressions they may get there are rapidly obliterated in the homes to which they return.

Time and again one hears earnest Sunday-school teachers say, "What can we do? We only get the children for one hour in the week, and the parents take absolutely no interest in religion." The church itself is to blame in giving the parents to understand that the Sunday-school is sufficient. The parents' responsibility for the education of the young is allowed to go by default. If the church shut up all Sunday-schools for a year and preached in season and out of season that it was the parents' duty and privilege and joy to lead their children to God, we might perhaps see that revival of religion in the home which must come before our young people are won for Christ.

Perhaps the church despairs that the fathers and mothers would undertake the task, and believes that it is better to have the work done in the Sunday-school than not have it done at all. Does the church believe in its organisations more than in its fathers and mothers? Did Christ believe in organisations more than in human nature? We must believe in

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the fathers and mothers more, and put more responsibility on them, if we would seek to save the children. The church has connived too long in the general decline in parental responsibility. To despair of the parent is to betray the child.

I look forward to the time when we shall have a modern catechism for parents and children. The word is old-fashioned, I know, and perhaps has sombre associations; but the need for the thing itself is clamant. The children should be taught by their fathers and mothers, and the church should appoint its representatives to see that the thing is well done, and to afford assistance to parents who find difficulty in doing it. Many fathers and mothers have not the slightest idea what the children learn in Sunday-school, and so vague are the contents of the Bible in their minds that they are totally unable to teach them. The Bible is never opened in the home, and if the children learn anything for the Sunday-school at all, it is conned up a few minutes before the opening exercises. No wonder religious instruction is regarded by the child as a namby-pamby subject, not to be treated with the same level of seriousness as the three Rs at school.

Most parents are more concerned about these three Rs than they are about the child's knowledge of God. To get on *in* life is far more important than

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to get on *with* life. Parents who don't pray and who regard their children's prayers as a piece of prettiness; parents whose own religious education stopped at the Sunday-school and who, except in church, have never opened a Bible since; parents whose homes are as secular as their souls and who have projected their religion into the church and left it there, make up a pathetically large majority of the fathers and mothers of our Sunday-school children. I am not an alarmist; I am only stating facts. And it is those children who are to create and live in the world of the future!

I wonder if I am wrong in thinking that a sign of spiritual declension in the church is that it is beginning to despair of converting grown-up men and women. Did Christ despair of men and women?

The church has a place for youth organisations, but increasing attention will require to be given to the leadership of these. It is not enough to get someone who is willing to run a troop of Scouts or is anxious to get up a junior choir. We need men and women whose souls are opened to the glory of God, and whose hearts are surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ—who see the big things in life.

We *have* leaders of such quality, the value of whose work is beyond all reckoning. We have leaders of a



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lesser quality, the value of whose work is almost nil. It begins and ends in their own egotism.

The church is better without youth organisations than to have such organisations run by the wrong people. What are leaders for in a church but to lead to Christ?

Leaders who fight shy of religion, who seldom attend church themselves, who turn a church upside down in the interests of their own organisation, who are supremely careless as to whether their young members ever hear of Jesus Christ or are trained to worship God, are the bane of the Christian church to-day. The church does not exist to pass a general benediction on all sorts of work among young people. It exists to bring them to God, and the organisation that fails to do that is betraying Christ and betraying the young people in its charge.

There is a growing tendency in the church to secularise its week-night activities and to employ its church halls for purely secular purposes. This secularised week will soon make the secularised Sunday, if it has not already made it. As we have said, there is a recrudescence of beauty in the church itself. Churches all over the country are being made more beautiful for the worship of our Maker. That recrudescence of beauty must spill over into our church halls where the work of Christ is done, and

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training given in the things of the spirit. We need to make them far more symbolical than they are of the Presence in the midst, and of the spirit that should animate all our work.

It is so easy to be secular in a church hall and to forget all about God, for often there is nothing in it to remind us of the sacred, except a few wall pictures scattered here and there, used to teach the primary school children their Sunday lesson. The whole place should speak of God, and nothing should be done there incompatible with His presence.

The Cross, I believe, should find its place in our church halls, to remind us of the kind of service we are expected to accomplish there, and no little meeting-room should ever be without some touch of beauty. If these things crush out certain kinds of activities, if we cannot dance in our church halls or use them for a children's "rough and tumble," it is all to the good. If the activities cannot stand the presence of beauty and Christian symbolism, they should never have been there to begin with, and the sooner they go the better.

It is in such an atmosphere that we should seek to train our children both in Sunday and in week-days. We should not make the mistake of thinking that the children prefer the secular to the sacred. They only prefer it as second best. They love to

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respond to God when they have been taught to do so. When we substitute a little religious play for a secular cantata, we don't find any diminution of their interest, but rather an increased sense of joy and achievement. Whether they know it or not, they are in touch with deeper sources of satisfaction. When we bring religion into our Scout and Guide activities, we don't find the whole thing goes flat and dull, but we find a strengthening of the spirit of comradeship.

I am writing merely as an individual, and I hope not as a censorious one; indeed, I write as an old Scout-master, but I do believe that the value of these two latter movements to the church is doubtful. Whatever they aspire to in theory, in practice they lay an insufficient emphasis on religious training and do not as organisations provide for it. It may not be the business of Scouters and Guiders to give religious training, but it is the church's business, and if it finds that that business is not being fulfilled by the organisations under its roof, the sooner it finds out other organisations to achieve that purpose the better. The church will require to decide – and decide soon – where it is going to throw its weight or to raise up new organisations altogether for its purposes.

One of the disquieting features of church life to-day

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is the manner in which young folk forsake all connection with it as soon as they have used its youth organisations. When they reach the stage of adolescence and work out of its youth associations, they seem generally to be unattracted by the fuller religious life which the church has to offer, unless they have been influenced by a church-going home.

The Bible class, which is meant to carry young folk through this period of adolescence, is not so much an asset as a problem. Young folk do not seem to be able to concentrate on Bible study, and seem to regard religion as something external to their problems and their needs. The trouble lies in the utterly irreligious atmosphere in which many are brought up, and the fact that the church relies far too much on the operation of the herd instinct and not on their innate capacity for God.

If the home has been secular and if their church activities have been social, how can we expect them to awaken to the reality of God? They have been betrayed before they reached manhood, and choose what they have been taught to choose. What the church needs to offer them at this stage of life is often just a sheer alternative to the way in which they have been brought up. They need to be taught to pray, to worship, to see God in life, and to surrender to the way of life made manifest in Christ.

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“Lord, teach us to pray,” was one of the requests the disciples made to Jesus. Our young folk are making it to us. “Help us to enter into religious reality, they say.” “Bring God into our lives. Tell us what worship means and prepare us for this great act of communion. Don’t take us for granted. We are desperately inexperienced beneath our show of self-confidence. If there is anything in religion make it real to us.” This cry for reality is the cry of youth to-day, and the church must hear the cry and meet it, for it covers a very real need.

It is not enough to teach our young people *about* God. We need to teach them to find God. To that end we must get them to *practise* religion. We must deal with their problems and difficulties, and show them how prayer helps and get them to pray themselves. We must take account of their idealisms and get them to practise the idealism of Jesus. We must take account of their yearning for God and lead them into the reality of the worship of God’s house.

It is not enough to put certain things into their minds and hope for the best. We are training them to join the church, and that training is a training of the whole character, body, mind and spirit. We must train them to *grow* in the knowledge of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

If young people have not had such a training and

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show the practical effects of it, it is very doubtful if they should be received into the membership of the church at all. Most ministers are conscious of the tremendous importance of their class for young communicants,<sup>1</sup> and do their very best in the few nights available to them to guide the young folk under their charge to a right approach to this great event. But the impression made is sometimes very superficial because of the lack of previous spiritual discipline. "Joining the church" is still with many a pious convention and seems to be becoming more so. No doubt the young people do so with all good intentions, but the seed sown falls on shallow ground and because it has no root soon withers away.

Ministers do not like turning away young people who show any signs of turning to God, but sometimes the signs ought to be much more manifest than they are. For young people to forsake the church for years and then drift in with others to join it may be promising, but it is not promising enough. For many there should be a period of probation before they are actually admitted to its membership.

I know how difficult that might be to introduce. Honesty compels me to say that ministers and office-bearers are generally afraid of offending people. We

<sup>1</sup> Again I write as a Presbyterian. In the Church of England, it would be the confirmation class.

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try to avoid giving offence, which very often means that we are not willing to suffer for Christ's sake. The line of least resistance is usually the most acceptable way. But it is not for the good of the young people themselves. We do not serve their highest interests by taking them for granted. There is room for serious thought here on the part of all concerned. Church membership has dire need of being raised above the level of a convention into the realm of a spiritual reality that seeks to fulfil itself in the religious fellowship of God's people.

If young folk have forsaken the fellowship, it should be made quite certain that it is that which they seek before being joined to the roll of the church's members. The aim of the church is not to add numbers to its roll, but to add Christians to the Body of Christ.

Let me disabuse the mind of the reader of any thought that I have solved all these problems in my own ministry. Far from it. I am well aware that even the suggestions I have made may not find favour in minds wiser and more experienced than my own. Yet I do not think it is wisdom and experience we need in the church to-day so much as courage. In dealing with the situation facing the church, one is dealing with the age-old situation that Paul knew and which he met with such supreme courage.

## THE GOD WHOM WE IGNORE

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. vi. 12). It is the old situation that gathered its forces together and crucified Jesus Christ when He was here among men. Yet He faced it purposively, lovingly, sacrificially for the good of men and for the Kingdom of His Father. He faced it alone. Yet He was not alone. The Father was with Him. The Father is with us still and we face it with Christ.

Nearer than breathing, closer than hands or feet, is the Kingdom of God. I have never yet been able to know what to make of a wonderful experience I had as a youth. I was out walking one night in the busy streets of Glasgow when, with slow majesty, at a corner where the pedestrians were hurrying by and the city traffic was hurtling on its way, the air was filled with heavenly music; and an all-encompassing light, that moved in waves of luminous colour, outshone the brightness of the lighted streets. I stood still, filled with a strange peace and joy, and the music beat on in its majesty and the traffic and the pedestrians moved through the light. They passed on their way, but the music and the light remained, pulsating, harmonious, more real than the traffic of the streets. Then I, too, lingeringly moved on, look-



## THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

ing back at times till I found myself in the real world again with a strange access of gladness and of love.

Whether such an experience is physical or spiritual, I cannot tell. How ignorant we all are! Neither can I tell whether the Kingdom of God is physical or spiritual or what it is. But once we have known its beauty, led in by the hand of Christ, life is never the same again. Of the reality of that Kingdom I am quite sure; nor do we wait on mystical experiences for its manifestation. It is as normal as was the life of Jesus. Love is normal. Truth is normal. Beauty is normal. It is we ourselves who distort life.

The angels keep their ancient places;  
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!  
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,  
That miss the many splendoured thing.

We try to deny the normality of His life, but our denial leads us to frustration and despair. Dazed and amazed with a wild surmise, perhaps we shall yet realise that we are living on the same earth where He once lived and suffered, and rejoiced in the reality of God. What man did to Him we know. We have reason to know, for we are daily doing it to one another. What God did for Him we can also know if we walk His way of unselfishness and passionate faith.

## THE GOD WHOM WE IGNORE

He gave us little beyond Himself and the church, which is the body of His spirit in the world. But in giving us the church He gave us the greatest gift it was in His power to give. If He could have given us more, we may be sure He would have given it.

How are we using that gift to-day?

Are we using it to heighten our spiritual perception, to widen our range of interests, to bring us into organic relationships with others, to deepen our assurance of the reality and the love of God? Or are we passing by on the other side?

What are we finding on the other side?

Christ is appealing to us in the church to-day, not for His credit as redeemer. His credit was never so low as when He hung upon the cross. Yet it is from there He appeals. He wants us in the church, not for its sake as an institution. That Lord of the spirit is not concerned with the maintenance of stone and lime. He appeals to us for our own sakes and for the sake of others, for a world unborn.

To our best selves He appeals, to our capacity for loyalty, love, self-sacrifice and faith. To that something in us which with all His heart He believed – that ability to say, “I will arise and go to my Father.”

The God whom we ignore is waiting to receive,

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forgive and restore us to His Fellowship. That is the gospel.

What is wrong with so many of us is the feeling that life is not worth while. We lack sufficient inspiration.

Are we forgetting the cross? God loves us as much as that!

When I survey the wondrous cross,  
On which the Prince of Glory died  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

So runs one of our most beautiful hymns. We all know humility and rebuke before the cross of Christ.

Yet when *I* survey the wondrous cross I am inspired!

Surely He did not die thus to rebuke us only, but to encourage us to believe mightily in ourselves and in God. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father!"

O wondrous love!

I do not despair of the church of the future. Its King and Head is the Lord Jesus Christ. In the providence and purpose of God it is in the world as His body and by His everlasting mercy it will be continued in the world as His body. The old visionary was right who, in the days of its persecution, saw a great multitude whom no man could

## THE GOD WHOM WE IGNORE

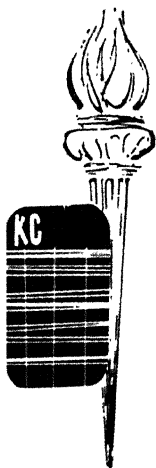
number, of every nation and kindred and people and tongue, gathered around the throne singing their songs of victory. Here or hereafter Christ shall see the consummation of His passion, and, in days to come, men illumined and redeemed will find through Him the way to God. The note of joy and victory beats through the whole of the New Testament and is the authentic note of the church. Amid the difficulties and problems which surround the church to-day, there is nothing so deep that His passion does not touch and His resurrection conquer. The church is still His church and in all its phases He is able to guide and to inspire. He has conquered, and humbly, yet confidently, living in Him we triumph with Him – the Lord of Life.

*Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

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